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*A qualitative exploration of the views of primary-school children from military families*

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‘Once we’ve just connected, we are broken apart’:  
A qualitative exploration of the views of primary-  
school children from military families

By Amanda Louise Hayllar

September 2018

Doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law (FSSL), School for Policy Studies, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol.

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*“Military children don’t wear uniforms, and they may be hard to recognize in their communities. Yet they serve and sacrifice alongside their parents in ways that often go unappreciated”.*

(Kudler & Porter, 2013 pg. 168)

## Abstract

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This thesis contributes to the current evidence base and understanding of children's experiences of being in a military family and how this impacts upon their wellbeing and education. It presents the findings of a qualitative research study that explored a group of primary-school-age military-connected-children's (n=8) perceptions of how they feel about having a parent in the military; how the lifestyle has impacted upon them positively and negatively; and what is important to them in terms of support at home and school.

The participants identified negatives associated with their lifestyle more readily than positives. Using thematic analysis, data collected from semi-structured interviews was organised into three main themes containing a number of subthemes. The first theme concerned the negative impacts of growing up within a military family and contained challenges largely associated with mobility and parental deployment. The second theme concerned positives identified by the children, which were largely perceived as practical. The last theme contained a number of strategies the children identified as useful for their coping, including building relationships with others, maintaining connections to absent fathers and friends, feeling empathy and understanding from others and having access to information.

The findings are discussed in relation to four psychological constructs: belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory. Implications for parents and professionals working with this group are suggested, as well as recommended next steps for research.

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Lastly, and mostly, thank you to my husband George, whose belief, patience and encouragement will always astound me; I will be forever grateful that you supported me in choosing a different path.

## Declaration

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I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulation and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidates own work. Work done in collaborations with, or with the assistance of others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author.

Signed:



Amanda Louise Hayllar

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

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AFF	Army Families' Federation
CEAS	Children's Education and Advisory Service formerly known as SCE(UK)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills formerly the DfE, Department for Education and the DfEE, Department for Education and Employment
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
LA	Local Authority (formerly Local Education Authority)
MCC	Military-connected child
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NASSSC	National Association of State Schools for Service Children
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
RAC	Royal Armoured Corps
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SCE	Service Children's Education
SCISS	Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) Working Group
SCiP	Service Children's Progression Alliance
SPP	Service Pupil Premium
SSAFA	Soldiers', Sailors' and Air Men's Families' Association

## 1. Introduction

---

### 1.1. Chapter introduction

It is estimated that around 0.5% of the total school population in England come from military families (Department for Education, 2010). However, there is no requirement for service personnel to declare children on their military records, or to schools; and there is no UK agency accountable for monitoring or tracking service children's education (Lynas, 2016; Ofsted, 2011). Therefore, we have no true and accurate record of the numbers of military children in UK schools, and estimates vary from 60,000 to 175,000 (Royal Navy & Royal Marines Children's Fund, 2009).

Although raising a family under the umbrella of a military lifestyle is not new, the changing nature of armed forces involvement brought about by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the growth of terrorism have placed tremendous strain on military families (Esqueda et al, 2012). Frequent and extended deployments are a reality for many military personnel, their spouses and children. There is growing evidence that military families' needs and their ability to cope with the demands of military life have changed in recent years (Aronson et al, 2011).

Military-connected children (hereafter, MCC) are a highly mobile group. Each year, it is estimated that 70% of primary-aged MCC move schools (Ofsted, 2011). Furthermore, around two in every five MCC who move schools do not make the expected progress during the year immediately following the transition (Department for Education, 2010). Reasons for this are complex, and to a large extent, not understood. The UK government recognises MCC as a vulnerable group, and as such, since 2011, has provided additional funding through the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) budget which allocates funding directly to schools through local authorities (LAs) to exclusively meet the needs of MCC in schools. To qualify for SPP, schools must record pupils as service children on their school census and the award is currently worth £300 per child (Ministry of Defence, 2018). The government outline the overall purpose of the SPP to be for schools to *"offer mainly pastoral support during challenging times and to help mitigate the negative impact on service children of family mobility or parental deployment"* (MoD, 2018). However, educational settings receive little guidance from the government about how to spend the SPP:

*"Schools have flexibility over how they use the SPP, as they are best placed to understand and respond to the specific needs of those pupils for whom the funding has been allocated"* (MoD, 2018).

Consequently, there is considerable variety in how schools invest the allowance. It has been argued that the provision of the SPP therefore, does not support schools in understanding the needs of MCC (Children's Commissioner, 2018).

The ramifications of a military career upon the men and women who serve in our armed forces has gained an increasing amount of attention in both UK and US research, but to date,

we know very little about the impact of military employment and deployment on the *children* of these communities:

*“Military children have long been overlooked in the education research literature. The effects of this oversight, however, are now starting to enter into the field’s stream of consciousness”* (Esqueda et al, 2012, pg. 69).

New projects such as the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiS, a collaboration between the University of Winchester and the MoD) which is currently running a project exploring the low numbers of MCC entering further and higher education (McCullough & Hall, 2016), and the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR, Rowe et al, 2014), indicate a growing appetite amongst researchers to fill this gap. The few projects that have tackled the subject of MCC’s wellbeing, however, have almost exclusively done so from the points of view of adults and caregivers; most often, parents or educators. Very little research has sought the *views of children* growing up under the umbrella of the military. The present study seeks to address this gap.

This thesis contributes to the current literature and understanding of children's experiences of being from a military family and how this impacts upon their wellbeing and their education. It presents the findings of a qualitative research study that explored a group of MCC’s perceptions of how they feel about having a parent in the military; how the lifestyle has impacted upon them positively and negatively, and what is important to them in terms of support at home and school.

The research was undertaken as part of the three-year Doctorate in Educational Psychology professional programme at the University of Bristol. I conducted this project whilst on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist with an English LA that has a large military population.

This introductory chapter will proceed with a discussion of the significance of this subject and its relevance to educational psychology. I shall then outline the rationale for the project, and my own position within the research by drawing upon the personal and professional experiences which led to this choice of topic. I will then discuss the research aims and questions that guided the study, followed by a brief outline of my epistemological stance and definitions of key terms. Finally, I shall provide a brief overview of the structure of the thesis with a summary of each chapter.

## 1.2. [Significance of the topic and relevance to educational psychology](#)

For several reasons, I believe this subject relevant to the educational psychology profession.

Firstly, Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well positioned within LAs to promote early identification of needs and intervention as they work with vulnerable children and families in need of support. The role of the EP has widened beyond its historical remit of identifying and addressing the needs of children and young people exclusively with special educational needs

and disabilities (SEND), towards supporting all vulnerable groups, such as those whose life circumstances are challenging. Psychologists have the relevant skills, experience and knowledge to address academic, emotional, and behavioural concerns associated with school transitions, and are therefore in an excellent position to research and comment on this potentially vulnerable group (Aronson et al, 2011).

Secondly, EPs are strategically positioned to work between homes and schools, often acting as a link or 'bridge' between the two systems but are yet independent of both. This places EPs not only in a good position to undertake research, but also for facilitating communication between systems and connecting families to school and community resources. EPs have an awareness of and are used to working within the different systems around a child and affecting change at different systemic levels.

Thirdly, EPs work systemically within schools and build relationships with decision-makers, such as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) or Headteachers. EPs are often therefore able to influence or shape interventions and have an overview of school cohorts, including being aware of current provision for vulnerable groups, such as MCC. In my LA, for example, EPs meet on a regular basis with school SENCOs and hold annual planning meetings where groups and individuals causing concern are discussed and planned for in terms of provision. Having an awareness of the needs of MCC would serve to enhance these conversations and allow EPs to represent the voices of this somewhat elusive group.

Fourthly, as I shall demonstrate, key psychological concepts such as belonging, attachment and resilience are particularly pertinent to MCC. EPs are knowledgeable about these theories and have an important role to play in working with schools to promote their understanding of how these psychological theories can help them understand and cater for the needs of MCC.

Lastly, I would argue that a crucial aspect to the EP role involves respecting diversity and the promotion of meeting the needs of diverse populations. This includes facilitating children's voices. Military families have been identified as *"a distinct cultural group that should be included as part of the nation's diversity and school reform efforts"* (Esqueda et al, 2012, pg. 69). I believe this makes MCC ethically meritorious of our attention as EPs.

### 1.3. Personal and professional background to the study

Living in a rural village, in a county with a high military contingent, I have had both positive and negative experiences of raising a family in my community of roughly 50% military and 50% civilian inhabitants. My children attended a pre-school setting on a military base, and they now attend a state primary school in which just under half of all children on roll are from military families. At various times within my community and local school, I have been aware of examples of both integration between military and civilian populations, and division and segregation. Consequently, I became interested in how different groups of people, with similarities but also distinct differences in their lifestyles, could reside inclusively and

harmoniously within a single small community, or whether groups would instinctively 'stick to their own'. I became particularly interested in whether the children themselves are aware of this complexity and how they deal with it.

This choice of topic was also driven by professional experiences. Although I qualified as a teacher in London, my first teaching job was in a semi-rural LA with a high military presence; a community very different from where I was raised and trained. Throughout my years in teaching, I taught a number of children from military backgrounds and consistently felt that I lacked an adequate understanding of their lifestyle or needs. The SPP was introduced in 2011, whilst I was a teacher. During the introduction of this initiative, I felt that as a school, we lacked information about the purpose of the budget or how it should be spent.

A child in my class, Jake\* had a father in the armed forces. Jake was happy, sociable, popular, intelligent and slightly cheeky; a real joy to teach. However, when his father went away on deployments, his whole demeanour changed, and he became withdrawn, quiet and anxious. Eventually, after repeated deployments, Jake's previously high attainment began to fall. My conversations with Jake revealed his ambivalent feelings about his father's job; he was proud of his Dad and talked with me about his father's dangerous (as was his perception) but brave career choice. However, he also felt the need to be resilient and stoic, and for the most part, he kept his fears about his father's safety and his uncertainty about the future hidden from others. Jake made a real impression upon me and I wondered if his experiences were representative of other MCC.

Lastly, my choice of this research topic is driven by my passion to facilitate and represent young children's voices. I feel that the views of primary-school children are underrepresented in research. Some of the reasons for this concern vulnerability, age, or perceptions that children's views at this age are transient and therefore somehow less meaningful. Despite these concerns, I feel we have a duty and responsibility to include young children's views in both EP practice and research (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Ingram, 2013); to shine a light on the real, lived experiences of young children and to empower them for the future by actively including children's voices within policies and practices. On my LA placement, I am astounded daily by how even short conversations with children can challenge my assumptions and reframe my thinking and as a psychologist, I aspire to empathically listen to and represent children's voices to others.

*\* A pseudonym*

#### 1.4. Research aims and questions

The current research aimed to listen to the voices of MCC and explore their views and experiences of school and their lives, with the hope of uncovering potential considerations for educational professionals, including teachers and EPs. In doing so, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the experiences (positive and negative) of MCC growing up with a parent in the military?
2. How, if at all, do MCC feel that being from a military background has affected them educationally, socially or emotionally?
3. How can children from military families be best supported in schools and families?

#### 1.5. Epistemological stance

My methodological approach will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. My epistemological stance refers to the philosophical grounding from which decisions are made about what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we ensure it is adequate and legitimate. Having selected a qualitative approach, I assume a firmly interpretivist stance, which *“respects the difference between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action”* (Bryman, 2012, pg. 30). Subjectivist research positions the world, including the lived experiences of my child participants, as inherently unknowable, and my role as a researcher is to construct an impression of this world as I see it, using the data gathered from my interviews. I recognise that my study is interpretative, in that I am interpreting the experiences and words of others.

#### 1.6. Definition of terms

The children in the present research shall be referred to as ‘military-connected children’ (MCC) throughout. In the present study, the terms ‘military’, ‘armed forces’ and ‘service’ are used interchangeably. All of these terms relate to the three services which jointly make up the UK Armed Forces: the Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force. It is important to recognise that the environments in which the families from each service live can be very different, but stereotyping can be equally unhelpful. Please see the list of abbreviations and acronyms for further definitions.

#### 1.7. Introduction to the chapters

The following chapter will present a critical review of the existing literature around MCC. The approach to systematically selecting and reviewing the literature will be explained, along with difficulties encountered during the literature searches. I shall then present what the literature to date has suggested are the positives and negatives for MCC, how these have affected MCC, and current approaches to providing support. At several points throughout the chapter, the reader will be referred to key psychological theories (presented separately in boxes) of relevance to MCC. The review will then present the small amount of available data on child voice within this topic. Finally, it will be concluded that several gaps within the literature remain, which justify the present study.



Chapter 3 will present the methodology. I will outline, in detail, my methodological orientation and philosophical approach, including my views on ontology and epistemology and acknowledge my role and position within the research. The research procedure will be presented, including details on the sampling strategy, methods of data collection and analysis. Lastly, I shall present ethical considerations pertinent to the methodology.

Chapter 4 will present the findings for the current study. Using thematic analysis, the coded data from the participant interviews will be presented within three main themes that broadly correspond to the research questions: the negative impacts of growing up in a military family, the benefits and opportunities of growing up in a military family, and coping strategies/building resilience. Each main theme contains several sub-themes which will be presented, accompanied by quotes directly from the children.

The final chapter will present a discussion of the findings. This chapter will draw together the different threads of this research to analyse and present the key findings and their contribution to the literature around MCC using the psychological theories introduced in Chapter 2 and comparisons with previous research. Under the four headings of belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory, conceptual and practical recommendations for those working and living with MCC will be suggested. This chapter also includes a critical examination of the research with reference to strengths, limitations, and suggestions for further study. Lastly, I will conclude with some personal reflections on conducting the research.

## 2. Literature review

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### 2.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the current literature on the impact on children of growing up within a military family. As well as reviewing a range of literature from different sources, the reader will also be introduced to psychological theories that I will argue are helpful in understanding the issues related to this group; namely belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory. These theories were selected as pertinent to the exploration of MCC's experiences following a review of the literature.

This chapter will present:

- The approach to the literature searches and difficulties within the research that were pertinent to the present study.
- A brief commentary on the *unique challenges* faced by military-connected children (hereafter, MCC) as identified by the literature, mainly focusing on mobility and parental deployment. This section will include an exploration of the psychological theories of *belonging* and *attachment*.
- A critical examination of the findings about the *potential impact* that these challenges can have on child outcomes; educationally, socially and emotionally, and the different factors that mediate relationships between these challenges and outcomes. This section will also include a brief introduction to the concept of *resilience*.
- Research concerning approaches to supporting MCC in their communities and schools, and a brief introduction to *bio-ecological systems theory*.
- Interspersed throughout the above, information will be presented regarding four key psychological theories: belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory. It will be argued that these theories are important to understanding the experiences of MCC and appropriately tailoring their support. Three of these theories have been applied to the MCC population by previous authors (attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory). Belonging has not previously been applied to this group, but was selected for inclusion following data analysis (see discussion chapter for more).
- The literature around collecting MCC's voices.
- A chapter summary outlining remaining gaps within the literature and this study's position in relation to them.

## 2.2. Approach to literature search

In order to collate and review all appropriate literature, a systematic literature review was conducted. Using the University of Bristol website, four databases were searched: PsychInfo, British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies and Educational Resource Information Centre (ERIC). Other relevant literature, including 'grey' literature (e.g. Government reports and policies), was found using internet search engines and added. Additional relevant literature was identified from the references of selected papers ('snowballing'). Additionally, the British Library's Electronic Thesis Online Service (EThOS) was used to search for unpublished doctoral theses of relevance to the topic. In the interests of transparency, the full procedure for conducting the literature search can be found in Appendix 1 but is summarised here. The searches were conducted in September 2017 and repeated in June 2018. Searches yielded the following results:

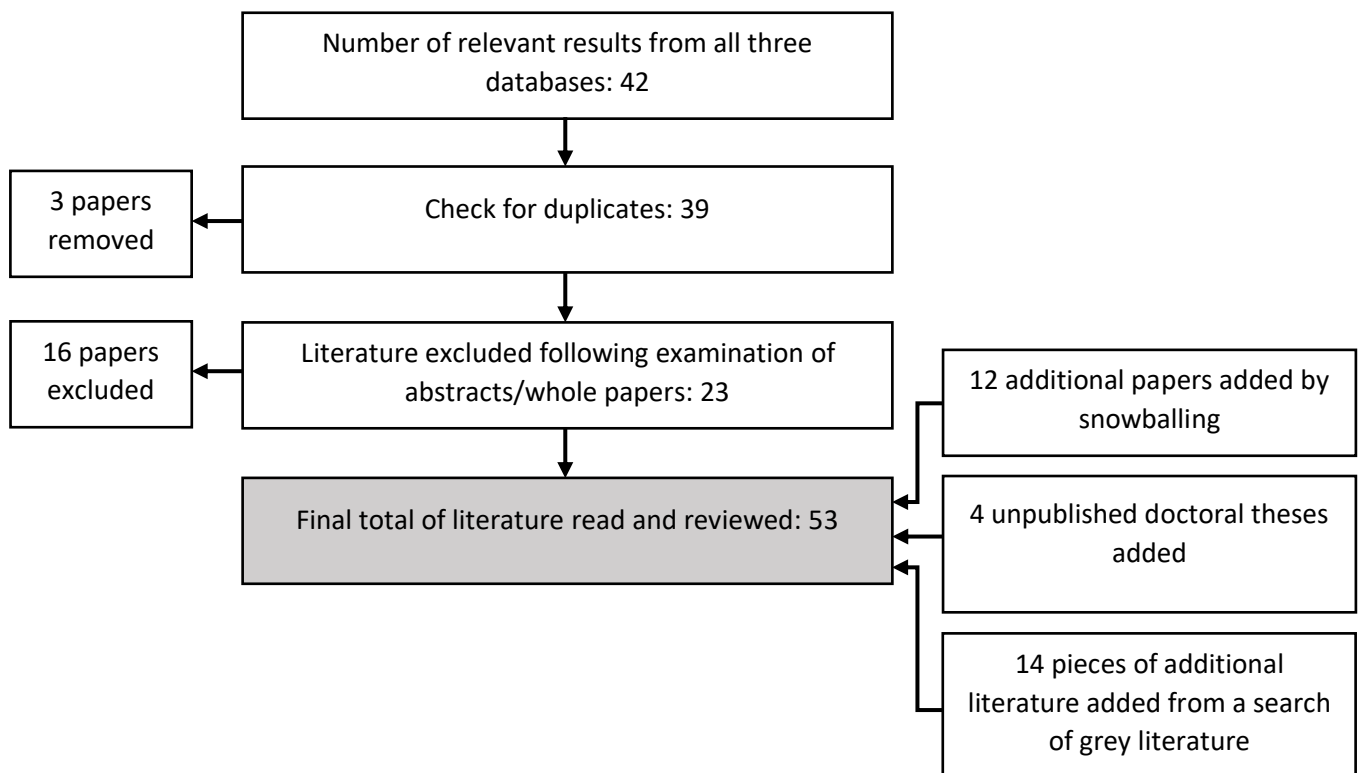


Figure 1: Approach to literature searches

Literature was excluded from the search for a number of reasons, including:

- Literature regarding military families but not relevant for the present study in terms of topic or research aims (e.g. conducting psychological assessments for custody court arrangements).
- Literature that referred to data collected under specific conditions that were not of direct relevance to the present study (e.g. war time).
- Literature that referred specifically to participants with mental health conditions (e.g. PTSD) rather than general wellbeing.

- Studies reporting outcomes for populations not of direct relevance to the present study (e.g. mothers, spouses, deployed fathers, children with autism, injured veterans, US National Guard personnel).

The literature was reviewed systematically, using Excel spreadsheets, organised by topic (see Appendix 2 for an example page). The review included both qualitative and quantitative research. Quality criteria, adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2013) was used to critically appraise research. The criteria included considerations of the appropriateness of aims, methodology, research design, recruitment procedures, data collection, any potential biases, ethical issues, data analysis and findings, and overall contributions to the field. The CASP criteria was used to inform my evaluation and critique of the research. Studies identified as high quality and of relevance to the topic were then used to structure the literature review. Selected literature was organised into topics depending on its content:

- Literature around *why and how* military families are vulnerable, including challenges associated with the military lifestyle (stressors were largely identified by the literature as related to mobility and deployment).
- Literature around the *impact* of challenges for MCC. This included studies presenting both positive and negative impacts of a military lifestyle for children. Informed by my reading, I conceptualised outcomes for MCC in terms of academic, social and emotional.
- Literature around the *factors which mediate the association between stressors and outcomes* for MCC. This included literature discussing the roles of SEND, age, gender, deployment cycle and family.
- Literature around *existing and suggested support* for MCC and their families, both in their communities and their schools.
- Literature around attempts to *seek, gather and represent the voices* of MCC.

Having organised and reviewed the literature according to the above topics, this process informed the structure of my literature review.

### 2.3. Difficulties with the literature

The literature on MCC is fraught with difficulties. Researchers and commentators in the field have noted a number of problems, including:

*“...criticisms of convenience samples, cross-sectional designs, retrospective reports, overreliance on parental or self-reports, overemphasis on negative outcomes, lack of attention to children or female service members and veterans, and lack of attention to mediating and moderating variables”* (Wadsworth et al, 2017, pg. 26).

In addition to the methodological issues noted above, other difficulties highlighted by researchers include gaining access to a highly mobile population, the lack of available longitudinal data and the applicability of measures not specifically designed for military cohorts (Chandra & London, 2013).

A particular complication for the present study concerns geography. The vast majority of the available research on this topic comes from the US, a country with considerable differences to the UK in terms of systems (e.g. school and military), politics, culture and attitudes. Given the paucity of UK information, it was necessary to include some literature from the US. It is therefore important to note the limitations of including research which is socio-politically less relevant to UK policies and systems. For the purposes of this review, I have prioritised and explored in greater depth available UK research, and supplemented this with US literature when needed (e.g. when UK data was not available).

#### 2.4. Why and how MCC are vulnerable

This section will explore current research literature with regard to the general and specific challenges that exist for MCC.

As outlined in the introduction, military families are recognised as a vulnerable group by the UK government as evidenced by the additional provision created for them in the form of the service pupil premium (SPP). It is generally recognised that, although military families face the same stressors as civilian families, additional stressors such as frequent relocation and displacement, unpredictable schedule changes, family separation (long and short term), and threats to service members' safety, place additional pressure on service families and increase their vulnerability (Conforte et al, 2017).

Evidence of a mixed picture of the impact of a military career on children exists. In a large UK study, Rowe et al (2014) surveyed 3198 military personnel about their perceptions of the impact their military career has on their children, in relation to various socio-demographic variables, military characteristics and mental health symptoms. Simple in its design, the main outcome measure was the perceived impact of a military career on children. This was measured on a three-point scale (positive, negative or no impact, plus a not applicable option). Just over half (51%) perceived their military career as having detrimental effects on their children; a finding strikingly similar to other research by Thandi et al (2017, presented later in this chapter). Researchers found that military personnel were more likely to report their career as detrimental to their children if they were a) not in a relationship, b) deployed for 13 months or more within a 3-year period, or c) had mental health concerns. As the results rely on self-report questionnaire data, it lacks the depth that would be possible with other forms of data collection (e.g. interview). Furthermore, the authors note that some of the participants were difficult to get hold of due to their high levels of mobility. It is possible therefore, that the sample could be biased and represent the views of a less mobile group. Furthermore, data was not collected regarding children's gender or ages; it would have been

interesting to further analyse parental perceptions according to these demographics. The sample consisted entirely of military personnel; it would be interesting to see if spouses and/or children's views within the same families corroborate the findings.

Research has attempted to explore the specific factors which may make life more challenging for MCC than civilian children. The Royal Navy and Royal Marine Children's Fund (2009) outlined 10 challenges specific to MCC, including mobility, deployment, influences of the media and other people's negative perceptions of military campaigns, bereavement and parental injury or illness.

Research from the UK and US highlights the most stressful demands of military life to be associated with (a) *mobility* (e.g. relocations of home and/or school); and (b) *parental deployments* (e.g. separations from loved ones, changes in family dynamics whilst the deployed parent is away and when they return, mental health of remaining and deployed parents, high levels of uncertainty) (Farrell & Collier, 2010; Aronson et al, 2011; Esqueda et al, 2012). The next section will therefore explore the literature for these two potential stressors.

#### 2.4.1. Challenges for military families: mobility

Relocation, within any population and at any time of life, is often rated as one of life's most stressful events, both for adults and children (Aronson et al, 2011). Relocation is often accompanied by negative outcomes for children and young people, such as higher rates of child dysfunction, behavioural difficulties, and failing a grade in school (Aronson et al, 2011). Multiple school moves are thought to compound difficulties. For example, the 'Dobson' report (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000), a government-sponsored study on pupil mobility in the UK, found that mobile children are disproportionately represented amongst the population of children identified as having behavioural and learning problems. MCC often relocate multiple times, and relocations are often accompanied by other stressful experiences, such as parental deployment or uncertainty. Aronson et al (2011) highlights that often these moves take place with little notice and against the wishes of family members, disrupting family routines and social relationships. Research is unambiguous and presents multiple moves as a heightened risk for MCC: *"the multiple changes in the child's life may bring discontinuity of education, difficulties with friendships and varying cultural lifestyles"* (Paradis, 2014, pg. 33).

Alongside a house move, relocation for MCC often coincides with a school move, with some service children relocating up to 14 times before they reach secondary school (Centre for Social Justice, 2016). Cases of frequent relocation are not uncommon; a recent study by Ofsted (2011) found that out of 140 military families, 18.6 per cent of military parents reported that their child had moved school more than five times. School transitions can be experienced as difficult because they typically require making many adjustments (e.g. leaving behind friends, forming new relationships with peers and staff, facing different academic

demands at a new school and being immersed in a novel school and community culture) that are not always pleasant (Aronson et al, 2011).

The Centre for Social Justice (2016) claim that mobility can place MCC at risk of negative outcomes:

*“While some children thrive from coming into contact with other cultures and the independence fostered by a mobile lifestyle, for others moving schools comes at a price, undermining friendships, and impeding academic performance and personal development” (pg. 55).*

As the above quote illustrates, there are a number of psychological issues related to mobility, including potential negative effects on social relationships, learning and self-esteem. Many of these issues are related to the wider psychological concept of belonging (please see box below).

#### RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY I: BELONGING

In its simplest terms, belonging can be defined as the human psychological need to be part of a group. Psychologists have long argued that humans have an inbuilt and powerful desire to belong to something wider and greater than their individual selves. Feeling accepted and embedded within a community by experiencing a sense of belonging are fundamental psychological needs for all humans (Maslow, 1943, 1954; Osterman, 2000). Experiencing a sense of belonging is essential for emotional wellbeing and development. Humans are inherently social beings and a need for belonging is connected to our innate desire to form attachments with others and to give and receive attention from others. The US psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) argued that the need to belong is a major source of human motivation and to a large extent, drives our behaviour. Maslow believed that belonging is one of five innate human needs (along with physiological, safety, esteem and self-actualisation needs) that must be met for an individual to be fulfilled in life. It has been argued that the need to belong is particularly relevant to the education system, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been embraced by the educational community. Schools are important systems in which belonging should be fostered to secure positive social, emotional and academic outcomes (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000). It follows therefore, that it is possible that the transient nature of a military lifestyle could impact upon a MCC’s sense of belonging. To date, this issue has not been explored in any real depth by researchers.

It is worth noting that when exploring issues relating to deployment, difficulties with definition may confuse understanding. For some, deployment refers exclusively to missions involving combat (Creech et al, 2014). However, for most others, the term ‘deployment’ refers to any ‘mission-related assignments’ undertaken away from a service members’ usual base (Siegel & Davis, 2013; Wadsworth et al, 2017). The MoD also defines deployment as *“when a service person is serving away from home for a period of time. This could be a 6 to 9 month*

*tour of duty, a training course or an exercise which could last for a few weeks”* (MoD, 2018). In line with the majority of the literature, the present study has adopted the latter definition and defines deployment as any significant period of work away from the family home.

Parental deployment has been shown as inherently stressful for military families by a number of researchers (e.g. Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011; Lowe et al, 2012; Thandi et al, 2017; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Ohye et al, 2016). In an examination of educational policies regarding MCC, Esqueda et al (2012) argued that deployment has significant and negative implications for MCC:

*“Parental deployments, war trauma, disability, illness, and/or death are among the military-specific psychological stressors placed on military children, and research has shown these stressors (and any resulting mental health issues) to negatively influence academic, psychological, and socioemotional outcomes among military children”* (Esqueda et al, 2012, pg. 65).

Kudler and Porter (2013) argue that a parent's deployment is stressful because it disrupts routines and family dynamics. Ohye et al (2016) concurs that one of the main stressors for military families is the disruption and subsequent renegotiation of family routines, roles, boundaries and structures that arises from deployment.

In 2009, the UK Armed Forces commissioned a mental health research team to evaluate the mental health of deployed personnel and this helps illuminate how parents feel deployment affects their children. The project, known as the ‘Operational Mental Health Needs Evaluation’ (OMHNE), was subsequently repeated on three further occasions. A range of measures was used, including assessments of mental health symptoms, questions on help-seeking and combat events, participants’ perceptions of how their current deployments impacted their intimate relationships and the potential effects on their children. Using this data, Thandi et al (2017) analysed responses from 4265 UK military personnel deployed to one mission in Iraq and three in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2014. Over half (55%) believed that their children had been adversely affected by their deployment. Although the study relied on self-report questionnaire data from adults about their children’s outcomes, and did not include children’s voices directly, a large sample was included and the survey represents one of the few studies to gain the perspectives of UK service members on the wellbeing of their children as a result of deployment.

To further explore the impact of deployment on MCC, it would be helpful to turn to meta-analytic reviews. However, such reviews are scant. Card et al (2011) compared the findings of 16 studies to explore the association between military deployment of parents and child adjustment, addressing three different areas of child adjustment: 1) *internalising* symptoms (e.g. sadness, depression, anxiety, loneliness and withdrawal), 2) *externalising* symptoms (e.g. rule-breaking and aggression) and 3) *academic adjustment* (e.g. academic engagement and test scores). The studies contained a large sample (n=19,172) and the overall finding was that the studies showed an association between deployment and MCC difficulties. However,



when broken down further, results showed a mixture picture. Overall maladjustment and academic problems showed a statistically significant association with deployment ( $p < .05$ ), but internalising and externalising problems, although associated with deployment, did not reach significance. The authors sought to present a picture of military deployment having a limited impact upon child adjustment, despite showing several statistically significant associations. In the occasions where a significant relationship is found (overall adjustment and academic problems), authors minimised these findings by referring to the heterogeneity of the samples and ambiguity of the measures used in the original studies.

A number of weaknesses exist with this review and its relevance to the current study. Firstly, only US studies were included. Not all of the studies included were peer-reviewed, and the study itself was funded by the US Department of Defense, casting doubt for me over its credibility. Furthermore, the publication dates of the studies covered a huge span (from 1978 to 2010); during which time undoubtedly, the nature of military deployment has undergone huge changes (which may or may not impact upon child adjustment). Authors also found it difficult to accurately determine deployment stage within many of the studies. The studies included children of ages  $<1$  year to 15 years old and relied on a range of different informants of child adjustment. For these reasons, I would argue that the sample of studies included show a considerable degree of heterogeneity. Furthermore, the studies relied on a combination of data rating child adjustment; from parent reports, teacher (or childcare provider) reports and standardised assessments (again, usually completed by parents or caregivers). However, what is noticeably absent from the studies and review is the voice of the child.

One of the reasons parents and children may find deployments challenging relates to attachment. The psychological theory of attachment concerns our ability to form and maintain close bonds with our caregivers, a process which could be disrupted by changing family dynamics and repeated parental absence. For this reason, this theory has relevance for MCC and will be introduced in the below box.

## RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY II: ATTACHMENT

Attachment theory relates to the close bond developed between a child and a caregiver during a child's formative years. British psychologist John Bowlby's (1907-1990) work on maternal deprivation first led to the development of attachment theory and posited that secure attachments with adults are essential to a person's social and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969; Rutter, 1981; Ainsworth et al, 1979). The theory of attachment has obvious links to the previously-discussed concept of belonging (see Box 1) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs in that successful attachments depend on adult caregivers being attuned to and meeting a child's needs. The need for children to form secure attachments with those around them is thought to be an evolutionary instinct to seek protection from caregivers and a fundamental biologically-based motivation, inherent in us all. A crucial human need, the implications of not developing secure and solid positive attachments are thought to be long-term and affect our psychological wellbeing for the rest of our lives.

Psychologists have long discussed and debated issues related to attachment. For the purposes of the present study, some research has viewed MCC through the lens of attachment theory and suggested that parental deployments can disrupt attachment relationships between parents and their children, which can in turn, negatively affect child outcomes (e.g. Louie & Cromer, 2014; Lowe et al, 2012; Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013). Please see Chapter 5 for more on the concept of attachment and its relevance to MCC.

In conclusion, it appears that the relationship between the challenges involved in living a military lifestyle and child outcomes is complex. To explore the issues in greater depth and seek clarity, this review will later consider and critique the literature for different outcomes: academic, social and emotional. However, in relation to outcomes, it is important to note that some research has highlighted that there may be benefits to child outcomes as a result of being raised within a military family.

### 2.5. Positive impacts of a military lifestyle for children

It is important to note that a military lifestyle is not always detrimental to families and some research has identified potential benefits for children of having a parent in the armed forces. Stites (2016), for example, explored the perceptions of early childhood teachers who reported a range of positive and negative implications for MCC (see later section on school perceptions), but amongst these, some teachers reported MCC to be generally better at adjusting to new situations, and more 'worldly-wise' and knowledgeable about the world.

Weber and Weber (2005) used a questionnaire to survey 179 military parents from four US secondary schools, focusing specifically on the impact of mobility. The study looked at parental reports of 'aberrant behaviours' of their children, as defined by suspensions from school, repeating a grade, behaviours requiring 'psychological evaluation' and the rather

vaguely termed 'school problems'. The authors concluded that overall, parental reports showed no differences for aberrant behaviours of children who had experienced fewer or more relocations.

However, a number of methodological and conceptual issues complicate the findings. Firstly, the study relied entirely on parent report of children's adjustment; no data was collected from either the children or school staff. Furthermore, the study did find an interesting significant difference between groups. Children who had experienced five or six moves showed greater levels of 'school problems' than other groups who experienced either less *or more* moves. The authors chose to interpret the finding of elevated school problems in this middle group as evidence that relocation is not detrimental to MCC:

*"If previous research were true, then one would expect that, as children experienced more relocations, they would accumulate more events of school problems experienced. The decreased prevalence of school problems in the very high relocation group is contrary to expectation, in that the children in this group would have naturally transited through the other groups as they experienced more relocations" (pg. 640).*

However, alternative explanations to this finding are equally feasible. For example, it could be that children who experienced multiple moves *were* adversely affected (as evidenced by the significantly high number in this group), but as the frequency of moves increased to seven or more, children's ability to cope with moves grew (see box on resilience later in chapter). Alternatively, children in the 'very high' relocation group may simply not have been in one setting long enough for school concerns to be raised. An interesting finding was that 135 of the 179 parents (75.4%) believed moves to be advantageous for their children. Additionally, as the numbers of moves increased, the strength of positive parental perceptions also increased:

*"Parental perceptions of the positive effect of relocation on child development actually improve as the number of relocations experienced increases, contrary to lay belief" (pg. 642).*

It would have been interesting if researchers had collected child data to see if the MCC shared their parents' optimistic sentiment. The authors found statistically significant associations between frequencies of moves and child behaviour; as the children experienced a greater frequency of moves, their behaviour improved. Although undoubtedly an encouraging finding, we must again remember that this study looked at parental report exclusively, neglecting to consider evidence from either the children themselves or from the schools. It is possible that parents may report situations more positively than others as a result of a psychological need to feel positively about one's own lifestyle choices. Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) suggests that we all have a drive to hold our attitudes and beliefs in congruence to avoid disharmony (or dissonance). This may mean that parents (either subconsciously or consciously) minimise any negative effects of the military lifestyle to themselves or to others. Alternatively, the tendency of parents to report less negativity as

moves increased may have been indicative of becoming 'resigned to' military life, rather than representing increased satisfaction with it. Furthermore, researchers did not consider additional factors such as gender child age, length of deployment or position within the deployment cycle.

Nevertheless, this (albeit limited) research does present some evidence of positive impact of relocation due to deployment and suggests that parents believe that multiple moves can build resiliency amongst their children.

#### 2.5.1. Summary of positive impacts of a military lifestyle for children

In summary, a very small body of research has suggested that being raised within a military family may have positive implications for MCC, in terms of being better able to adjust to new situations, and being more knowledgeable about the world. Other research has identified that some military parents argue that relocations can be beneficial for their children. Having explored the evidence around positive impacts, the next sections will present and critique the existing literature around the *negative* impacts of military life for children specifically in terms of academic, social and emotional outcomes.

### 2.6. Negative impacts of a military lifestyle for children

#### 2.6.1. Academic outcomes

In the UK, Ofsted (2011) commissioned a survey to investigate the quality of educational provision and outcomes for service children, in response to national data which suggests that MCC attain as well as or better than their civilian peers at the end of each key stage. Inspectors surveyed a large range of schools using visits and questionnaires. The findings were that, due to high levels of mobility, the figures obtained from national data are difficult to interpret with confidence and the picture is actually far more complex than the data suggests. Ofsted denigrated the numbers as "*statistically flawed*" (pg. 14). Frequently, children had changed schools between data collection points; therefore, information collected between key stages (and used to ascertain progress), in actual fact related to different cohorts of children. High levels of mobility therefore make it impossible to reliably ascertain attainment and progress.

Furthermore, Ofsted found a discrepancy between mobile and non-mobile military pupils, with mobile military pupils performing significantly worse, possibly as schools do not get to know these pupils well enough to appropriately tailor learning or interventions to their needs. This finding implies that children who are geographically stable are at an advantage. Additionally, Ofsted found that the overall picture of MCC's academic attainment and progress is further confused by inconsistencies between school monitoring procedures; many schools either did not appropriately record military status or failed to effectively track or monitor MCC's learning.

Other research points to a negative impact upon academic achievement. Recent British research has shown that attainment in English at Years 10 and 11 is lower among pupils with at least one parent in the British army than their civilian counterparts (Unit for Child and Youth Studies, 2014). Similar results have been found in US and Canadian studies (see Centre for Social Justice, 2016, for a review).

In summary, although at surface level, national data suggests otherwise, it is very difficult to reliably ascertain a picture of the academic outcomes for MCC in the UK. Later in this review (see section 2.9) I shall review evidence regarding MCC's experiences and support in schools, however, factors such as frequent moves, possible repetition or omission of learning, and lack of information sharing between schools (Ofsted, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, 2016), can place the educational outcomes of MCC at risk:

*"There is a clear recognition by Government that the mobility associated with Service life can have a detrimental impact on children's emotional well-being and their educational attainment"* (Ofsted, 2011, pg. 10).

#### 2.6.2. Social and emotional outcomes

It has been suggested that up to a third of MCC are at risk of psychosocial difficulties or impaired emotional, cognitive, or physical functioning during parental deployment (Ohye, 2016). In the UK, there is increased recognition of the social and emotional vulnerability caused by military life: *"a key impact of Service life on children and young people was one of social and emotional disturbance"* (Ofsted, 2011, pg. 15).

As part of a UK evaluation of emotional literacy curriculums, Eodanable and Lauchlan (2011) surveyed school staff in a Scottish primary school, who felt that MCC showed immature social and emotional skills for their age, and higher levels of anxiety. However, in the school in question, 90-95% of pupils on roll were from military backgrounds thus making any comparisons with civilian children difficult.

In a review of US research studies, Wadsworth et al (2017) compared military children with civilian samples (data gathered in 2008, 2011 and 2013) and concluded that MCC are more likely to engage with risky behaviours (e.g. smoking, carrying a weapon to school) and are more likely to have had suicidal ideations. The authors also reviewed medical records which showed an increase in psychotropic medications for children from military families and higher rates of anxiety, stress and 'behaviour disorders'.

Huebner et al (2007) conducted 14 focus groups with 107 adolescents (aged 12-18) and asked them about the psychological and emotional impacts of having a deployed parent. Almost a third (n=34) of participants talked about negative changes to their mental health because of deployment, referring to depression and anxiety. The researchers found the ambiguous loss theory (Boss, 1999) to be helpful to understanding the experiences of military-connected adolescents. According to this theory, ambiguity coupled with loss creates a barrier to coping.

Huebner et al posited that it is the *uncertainty* that surrounds deployment that drove the adolescents' emotional responses to it rather than the deployment itself. Half of the sample consistently mentioned words such as 'nervous', 'worried', 'confused', 'mad', 'lonely', 'isolated', 'sad', 'afraid' and 'shocked'. The research concludes that:

*"Adolescents in our study exhibited a range of emotions associated with deployment reflecting uncertainty about its meaning and how it would affect them. Their early and ongoing responses to deployment revolved around not knowing what would happen in the future, either with their deployed parent's welfare or their own" (pg. 119).*

This quote suggests that negative emotional outcomes can arise due to the uncertainty that surrounds a parents' deployment. It will be interesting to see if uncertainty plays a role with the primary-school-age children in the present study.

Also in the US, Chandra and London (2013) conducted focus groups and semi-structured interviews with teachers, counsellors and administrative staff (n=148) in 12 schools. Participants were asked to comment on the unique behavioural/emotional, social and academic issues for MCC. Data was collected regarding age, gender, length of deployment, point in deployment cycle, and branch of military (active service vs National Guard). Grounded theory techniques were used to analyse the ensuing qualitative data. Analysis showed that although many MCC coped well in school, a significant number were seen by school staff as struggling with issues related to deployment to an extent that impacted upon their ability to function in school. Key issues according to staff were: uncertainty about deployment length, increased stress at home, and mental health issues of non-deployed parents; staff believe all of these factors contributed to MCC's functioning at school. School staff felt that this group lacked a support network at school that understood their military experience and MCC were therefore somewhat isolated. Similar to Huebner et al (2007), uncertainty and ambiguous loss played a central role. Large numbers of staff (42% for focus groups, 31% of interviews) reported that MCC do not receive enough information about deployment, which can compound fears of losing a parent. Staff reported that deployment leads to sadness and anger (83% focus group, 56% interviews), and disrupts classroom activities and peer relationships.

A number of noteworthy issues exist with this study. Firstly, it must be noted that this is US research, and concerns an adolescent population, two distinguishing factors that differ from the present sample. Secondly, it would be interesting to compare school views with data from children or parents in order to triangulate. Lastly, there was considerable heterogeneity in the sample. Schools with vastly different numbers of MCC pupils on roll were included (ranging from 30-98% MCC), it has been shown that schools with higher or lower numbers of military pupils often have very different cultures and procedures around military children (Ofsted, 2011). Furthermore, the authors concede that these numbers are approximate as schools generally lack reliable data on which pupils are from military backgrounds.

Again, from the US, Creech et al's (2014) systematic review of 11 mixed-age sample research studies concluded that:

*"Deployment is consistently and significantly associated with the functioning of children throughout childhood...the deployment of a parent is a correlate of increased emotional and behavioral difficulties when compared with a community sample or non-deployed group of children" (pg. 458).*

This review also showed that risks for negative outcomes increase during the period of deployment. Again however, this review is largely based on parental report of child outcomes and relies solely on US data.

### 2.6.3. Summary of academic, social and emotional outcomes

In summary, the research suggests that being raised within a military family *can* put children at risk of negative academic, social and emotional outcomes. It appears that parental deployment and mobility are the two predominant risk factors for children, and these can leave children at greater risk of struggling or falling behind at school, friendship difficulties or social exclusion, and/or experiencing negative emotions. However, we also know that there are some benefits to living a military lifestyle, and some children respond better to these challenges than others. The next section will present the research on *why* this may be so, with an exploration of the factors that could explain these differences and potentially mediate the association between stressors and outcomes for MCC.

### 2.7. Which factors mediate the association between the challenges of military deployment and child outcomes?

As this review thus far has illustrated, the relationship between MCC status and negative or positive outcomes is not straightforward. Some children cope better than others and researchers have attempted to explore reasons for this. A range of risk and protective factors that either compound or mitigate against the effects of being a MCC have been suggested. Risk factors refer to conditions that increase the vulnerability of families to negative outcomes, whilst protective factors increase resistance to challenges.

A recent systematic review was carried out by Bello-Utu and Desocio (2015) to examine the effects of deployment and family reintegration on MCC. Bello-Utu and Desocio compared 27 studies and found that child age, the mental health and coping of both parents (the remaining and deployed parent upon return), plus the pre-existing resilience, risks and resources of the family are the most important predictive factors of a child's ability to cope. Again however, the data relies on US studies. The studies selected for review were also significantly heterogenous. For example, the children referred to in the studies ranged in age from birth to 19. The studies also contained a wide range of measures to assess child outcomes, containing both standardised and non-standardised assessments. Lastly, the studies included

the perceptions of a wide range of respondents, including parents, school teachers, and children. With such a disparate collection of research, it is difficult to make definitive statements about child coping with a high degree of confidence.

Returning to Thandi et al's (2017) research on the views of service-members regarding the impact their career has on the wellbeing of their children, over half of UK deployed service personnel expressed concerns. However, the effects of deployment were mediated by a number of factors among deployed personnel including symptoms of psychological distress and traumatic stress symptoms, and stressful events occurring at home during the deployment. The authors concluded that there are a range of variables which can place a family at increased or reduced risk of maladjustment and poorer outcomes as a result of deployment. These include the level of risk associated with a current deployment (deployed personnel were more likely to report their relationships as adversely affected if they were in high-risk deployments), the mental health of the deployed person, and increased 'home front stress' (e.g. financial concerns, relationship worries). The authors conclude by emphasising the importance of support back home for improving outcomes not only for the deployed troops, but for the whole family.

In a review of the literature, Russo and Fallon (2015) highlighted potential risk factors for military families as being highly mobile, experiencing multiple and frequent deployments, having one primary or single parent, an interrupted educational curriculum, emotional instability, stress, and low economic status. Whereas, having integrated community supports, family cohesion, solid family and peer support networks, consistent learner outcomes, access to counselling and social work programmes, resilience building factors, and financial support as protective factors. The below sections will further identify some of the relevant literature around specific risk and protective factors in an attempt to investigate which MCC are more prone to negative outcomes than others.

#### 2.7.1. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Having SEND is thought to be an aggravating risk factor for poorer coping (Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011; Ofsted, 2011; Children's Commissioner, 2018), with recent statistics showing numbers as high as 2,014 service children with SEND on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) database, of whom 700 move schools in any one year (Paradis, 2014). Poorer coping may arise for a number of reasons, predominantly to do with individual needs and diagnoses (e.g. autism) (Lincoln et al, 2008; Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011). In-school factors may also play a role; for example, Ofsted (2011) suggested that highly-mobile military pupils with SEND do not stay in one school long enough for staff to develop a full appreciation and understanding of their needs and thus tailor teaching or intervention accordingly. The process by which vulnerable children can receive additional support through LAs (e.g. through an Education, Health and Care Plan) is lengthy and could be difficult to achieve if children are regularly moving between



schools. Poor exchange of information between schools is also thought to be a factor (Ofsted, 2011).

### 2.7.2. Age and gender

It has been suggested that age is significant; with adolescents thought to be particularly vulnerable to feelings of uncertainty and loss in the face of parental deployment (Huebner et al 2007). Negative emotions such as anxiety, worry and sadness have also been identified as prevalent in US MCC aged from 6-12 (Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015).

Gender differences also may be present; Chandra and London (2010) spoke to school staff who reported that military-connected boys are more likely to externalise emotional difficulties through anger and aggression, whereas military-connected girls are more likely to internalise their feelings, and experience anxiety or depression. Some school staff also reported that adolescent girls are more likely to engage in risky behaviours (e.g. self-harm or promiscuity) than boys. However, it should be noted that similar gender differences are also frequently noted in civilian populations; for example, boys are more likely than girls to receive referrals to educational psychology services for concerns regarding behaviour (Vardill & Calvert, 2000).

### 2.7.3. Deployment cycle

Researchers have identified particular times during a serving parent's deployment, when MCC may be more vulnerable, pointing to evidence of a 'deployment cycle' (Pye & Simpson, 2017; Lincoln & Sweeten, 2011, Ohye et al, 2016; Siegel & Davis, 2013). Deployment cycles have been conceptualised in different ways, but typically refer to three stages: the time prior to a deployment, during deployment, and reintegration (Siegel & Davis, 2013). Ohye et al (2016) argue that different challenges occur at each stage of deployment and reintegration. The authors argue that, during phases of the deployment cycle, children with a deployed or returned parent may experience feelings of abandonment, worries about their parent's emotional or physical health, anticipatory anxiety around the parent's return, and difficulties with re-establishing a relationship with the returned parent. They argue that these risks would be manageable in the short-term, but it is the 'repeated and prolonged nature' of a military lifestyle that places MCC in danger of poor outcomes. Ohye et al's study presents the findings of a school-based intervention that will be reviewed later in the chapter.

In a UK study, Pye and Simpson (2017) surveyed 78 army wives about marital and family functioning across the three stages of the deployment cycle. The spouses of currently deployed and recently returned service personnel were found to be less satisfied with their family and its communication, indicating that the latter two periods of the deployment cycle are most problematic for family functioning. An interesting feature of the research design was that families were asked to submit a family drawing by the youngest child of the household.

The researchers concluded that during and post-deployment, *“children’s pictures indicated higher levels of dysfunctional parent-child alliance, whereas pre-deployed families responded similarly to non-military families”* (pg. 1856). Limitations to the study design exist; the study employed a long-distance method involving distributing survey packs to families in the post, thereby limiting interactions between participants and researchers. Furthermore, I would argue that analysing children’s drawings remotely and without direct interaction with the children is highly speculative and raises questions regarding validity. To counter this, the researchers compared the drawings with those from a small control sample (n=34), contributing a degree of reliability to the findings. Due to the small numbers involved, and questions over the methodology, the findings must be accepted with a degree of trepidation; however, this represents one of the very few UK studies to explore the impact of the deployment cycle and to directly explore family views. The authors present their findings as ‘tentative’ and call for more longitudinal research.

In the US, Huebner et al (2007) found that almost 40% (42/107) of adolescents surveyed reported reintegration to be a particularly difficult time, partly due to the changing in routines and responsibilities at home whilst the parent was away, and also due to the increased intensity of the remaining parent-child relationship and to shifting family dynamics.

Chandra and London’s (2010) research with educational professionals confirmed that school staff also believe deployment cycle to be important. Similar to Huebner et al (2007), staff perceived that reintegration is a particularly difficult time for families, due to the shifting in family dynamics, the pressure to feel excitement following a deployed parent’s return, dealing with any changes in deployed parent (e.g. physical, psychological, emotional changes) and dealing with changing dynamics in parenting between the two parents.

Kudler and Porter (2013) found that different readjustments were needed at different points throughout the cycle, which has implications for services such as community and school support:

*“The services that war-fighters or their children need as they prepare for deployment are different from those they need during deployment or in the days, weeks, months, and years after the service member returns home”* (pg. 167).

This collection of studies indicate that the deployment cycle may be a mediating factor in children’s coping, with different experiences for MCC evident during the cycle.

#### 2.7.4. Family

The role of family is complex and can either serve as a risk or protective factor for MCC. Palmer (2008) argued that the effects of military life on child outcomes follow an indirect pathway through parental stress and psychopathology and that parent-child interactions are pivotal to a child’s ability to cope. In a discussion article, Palmer reflects on the importance of parents’ adjustment and argues that it is not military life per se that is

hazardous to MCC, rather the serving and remaining parent's reaction to it. Following this theoretical pathway, children will cope well with the challenges associated with military life if their parents do.

Other commentators concur that the role of family, and particularly parents, is vital:

*"Military parents' resilience and vulnerability affects the resilience and vulnerability of their children"* (Kudler & Porter, 2013, pg. 167).

It appears that the coping mechanisms employed and modelled by parents are critical and can either help or hinder.

Military spouses appear to be particularly important. In the US, Posada et al (2015) surveyed mothers with deployed spouses about their relationships with their children. Mothers who reported positive attachments with their children were also more likely to report good quality interactions with their children, lower rates of maternal depression and higher levels of father involvement. The study included a large sample (n=292) of military wives, and relied on concurrent rather than retrospective data, two important strengths of the study. However, the research lacked a control group, relied purely on maternal reports, and used data collected from one point in time, rather than longitudinally. Furthermore, for the purposes of the present study, again we rely on US data and thus must apply caution when applying to a UK population. In a similar finding, Creech et al's (2014) review of the literature found that *"the caregiver's mental health is associated with children's response to deployment"* (pg. 458).

Unfortunately, a family's efforts to adapt may miscarry. Huebner et al (2007) found that adolescents reported changes in the intensity of relationships between remaining parents and adolescents during deployment, often marked by higher levels of conflict. The authors posited that this could be due to increased stress in the family home or the remaining parents' lack of ability to cope with the deployment of their spouse. Parental coping strategies are key and can impact upon MCC, whether they are positive or maladaptive (e.g. withdrawal, volatility). For example, a military child might learn to withdraw, become quiet or even aloof in the face of a parent's volatile emotions and violent outbursts (Kudler & Porter, 2013), or to demonstrate reserve or a 'stiff upper lip' in the face of adversity. It could be argued that such strategies may help a child to adjust to a parent's deployment-related problems, but equally, could generate negative psychological implications over time.

Shifting family dynamics is also a feature. Chandra and London (2010) spoke to school staff who felt that MCC are often expected to assume more responsibility at home during times of deployment. 50% of staff voiced concerns that levels of responsibility for MCC were too high and that MCC sometimes take on the role of a co-parent with the remaining parent, engaging in tasks that present heavier-than-usual practical or emotional burdens on the child. Although unfortunately again for our purposes, the research was conducted in the US, the methodology offers an in-depth view as data was collected using focus groups and (telephone) interviews, as opposed to the majority of research with military families which utilises questionnaires or surveys. In a similar finding, Huebner et al's (2007) adolescents reported boundary ambiguity

and changes in roles and responsibilities in the home to be a source of stress. However, the authors also note that for some, changes at home also provided an opportunity for growth.

The relationships between the stressors of mobility and deployment, and outcomes, may therefore be mediated by family, both positively but also negatively. Research suggests that familial factors can either be protective or can further compound difficulties for MCC.

#### 2.7.5. Summary: mediating factors and resilience

In summary, many researchers and commentators have attempted to explain the diverse responses to the challenges of military life amongst MCC by suggesting a number of risk and protective factors. There is evidence to suggest that factors such as SEND, age, gender, deployment cycle and family dynamics are significant in determining an individuals' capacity to cope.

Each of the studies discussed in this review have a common characteristic; there is considerable variety in how MCC respond to the increased risks associated with being raised in a military family, with some families and children faring considerably better than others. The psychological theory of resilience describes how individuals respond to the risk and protective features around them, and I would argue therefore, that resilience may be key to explaining this heterogeneity and aid us in understanding the experiences of MCC. Please see the box below for a brief introduction to resilience.

## RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY III: RESILIENCE

Resilience is commonly defined as the positive or protective mechanisms that mitigate against poor outcomes under the conditions of risk. The concept has two defining features; the presence of threat or adversity, and evidence of success, achievement or positive adaptation despite the difficult conditions brought about as a result of such threat or adversity (Toland & Carrigan, 2011). Historically the concept has drawn the attention of psychologists and researchers who were interested in why some individuals appear to be more invulnerable or 'stress-resistant' than others (e.g. Rutter, 1987).

First applied to developmental psychology, the concept of resilience is increasingly discussed in educational psychology (Toland & Carrigan, 2011) and has evolved in its perception. Rather than the product of an innate, fixed set of characteristics that an individual may (or may not) possess, resilience is now perceived as a dynamic, rather than static process, and therefore amenable to change and transformation throughout our lifetime, both positively (e.g. through intervention) and negatively (e.g. through changes in circumstance or life events). Resilience has links to the previously-presented psychological theories of belonging and attachment as an individuals' resilience is often related to the strength of their social relationships.

The concept of resilience has been applied to military children by an increasing number of researchers (e.g. Weber & Weber, 2005; Oshri et al, 2015; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Masten, 2013; Garcia et al, 2015; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Wadsworth et al, 2017; Saltzman et al, 2013) and will be returned to in Chapter 5. It has been argued that interventions with military families in homes, schools and communities, should focus on building up MCC's resilience to improve their capacity to cope with the challenges of military life (Russo & Fallon, 2015).

### 2.8. Support for military families: support systems

Although the findings above highlight that military personnel and their families are a vulnerable population, studies have found that as a group, military families are less likely to seek help from mental health services than civilian families (Becker et al, 2014; De Pedro et al, 2014) and have less involvement with schools (Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2011; Farrell & Collier, 2010). Barriers to seeking help include a range of external and internal factors, such as logistics, perceived stigma and a 'self-reliance' ethic common within the military (Becker et al, 2014). Despite a growing awareness that children from military families are vulnerable, little guidance exists either here or in the US about how to best support MCC (Stites, 2016). The following section will present messages from research about how military families, and in particular, MCC should be supported.

As shown, it has been argued that promoting resilience for MCC is key. An important way in which to do this is to consider MCC's support networks or systems. The support systems around an individual are critical to resilience. For MCC, arguably two of the main support systems are family and school. School therefore, can be a powerful protective factor for MCC:

*"School and school experiences are therefore crucially important to promoting resilience" (Toland & Carrigan, 2011, pg. 100).*

Toland and Carrigan (2011) describe schools as a “*key part of the micro-system of the developing child*” (pg. 100). Before presenting the literature on how schools can support MCC, I shall first explain the importance of schools for children using another key psychological model: Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory (1977).

#### RELEVANT KEY CONCEPTS FROM PSYCHOLOGY IV: BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory of development (1977) argues that a child’s experience and development emerges from the interplay between five interconnected systems: microsystems (e.g. educational settings, home); mesosystems (interactions between microsystems); exosystems (settings and practices that affect but do not directly involve the child, e.g. a parental workplace); macrosystems (societal systems and customs); and chronosystems (ecological changes that occur over a life span). In this model, children’s outcomes are a product of the interactions between the different systems at play, as well as their own biology. The theory states that a person’s experience is shaped by how their individual personality and characteristics interact with the environment (made up of the interconnected systems) they find themselves in. Considering the different layers or systems we inhabit also has implications for providing support, as support can also be offered at different levels. For example, microsystem-level support could take place within the family or the classroom, whereas exosystem-level support could refer to educational policies or practices.

This model could provide a helpful lens through which to explore the experience of MCCs. Viewing these families through a bio-ecological systems lens, I would argue, is conceptually useful as it leads to an exploration of the different systems which MCC inhabit (e.g. family, classroom, school, military community). If we assume that children’s experiences are shaped by the systems they inhabit, arguably, military children exist within systems of deeper complexity than others (Masten, 2013). Home and school are microsystems that will shape a child’s experience and reciprocally influence one another. But children from military families are also affected by another system, that of the military itself, which could be considered either another microsystem or an exosystem, with its own implicit societal rules and customs:

*“Military children don’t exist in a vacuum; rather, they are embedded in and deeply influenced by their families, neighborhoods, schools, the military itself, and many other interacting systems”* (Kudler & Porter, 2013, pg. 163).

Furthermore, for a highly mobile military child, the different systems they inhabit are constantly shifting with each relocation. A very small body of literature (theoretical rather than empirical) has considered MCC from a bio-ecological perspective (Kudler & Porter, 2013; Paley et al, 2013; Masten, 2013). At present, we therefore lack empirical data to either support or refute the application of this theory to MCC. However, it will be returned to in Chapter 5.

## 2.9. The role of schools in providing support for MCC

How schools can meet the needs of MCC has largely been ignored in research (Esqueda et al, 2012) and few evidence-based interventions exist to support resilience in this population (Ohye et al, 2016).

Russo and Fallon (2015) argue that it is time for a cultural shift in how schools view and support MCC. They claim that traditionally, schools view MCC through a 'deficit model' lens with the military lifestyle perceived as inherently problematic. The authors call for a change in how schools view and consequently treat MCC, focusing more on resilience-building:

*"The real challenge for educators is to realize the bias in viewing students from military families with that deficit model. Instead, educators need to help their students, especially the very young children, to develop resiliency and adaptive coping skills that improve their lives and help them to appropriately face all of life's challenges" (pg. 407).*

This quote highlights how commentators have called for a shift in how we perceive and support MCC, from focusing on the challenges they face, towards building their resiliency and inner strengths.

We know then, that schools have an important role to play. But less is known about the mechanisms of support that schools should and do provide. The next section will review the evidence on school-based approaches to understanding and supporting the needs of military children.

### 2.9.1. UK context

The vast majority of research into how schools understand and support the needs of MCC comes from the US, with very little research representing the needs of British MCC. However, in recent years, a growing number of organisations have worked to develop an offer for MCC in the UK.

The Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) is part of the MOD's Directorate Children and Young People (DCYP) with the remit to advise parents on issues regarding the education of MCC in the UK and overseas. Service Children's Education (SCE) is a subsidiary organisation of the Ministry of Defence which oversees the education of service children overseas and advises military parents in the UK. The Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) Working Group was established at the request of the DfES to look into a range of issues and concerns (including mobility and funding) that were raised by Headteachers of state schools with service children in the UK.

These organisations have produced various guidance documents and videos, including the 'Service Children in State Schools Handbook' (2013), guidelines for school governance (July

2016), and 'Moving Schools' packs for families, schools and children (discussed later, in section 'engagement with parents'). Although helpful, the focus of these documents is firmly on *process* and *practical guidance*; for example, they recommend ensuring information about a child is current and passed on. The documents are vague on the subject of MCC's *academic, emotional or social needs* and how to meet them. For example, the latest document produced for parents and schools 'Information to Support Service Children Moving Between Schools' (2017) contains sections on actions required by parents when notifying of a school move, a suggested list of forms to complete to ensure relevant information is passed on, a proforma for a 'pupil information profile' and template of a covering letter, a list of FAQs and information regarding UK groupings. The guide fails to enlighten schools in understanding or meeting the needs of MCC. The situation in the US is similar; traditionally, the military has provided good *practical* support for families in terms of deployment and relocation (Aronson et al, 2011). However, Aronson et al argue that practical support alone is not sufficient and other systems must work together to meet the needs of MCC and their families. They advocate for approaches that involve a 'triad of support' provided by the family, the community and school.

A recent collaboration between the MOD and the University of Winchester has led to the newly-developed Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP), a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from military families. Identifying and meeting the needs of MCC is an issue growing in terms of educational, political, social and public consciousness. Evidence of this comes from a recent publication from the Centre for Social Justice (2016) who argue that the system of support for MCC continues to be lacking. They propose a system similar to that which exists for another vulnerable group, looked-after-children (LAC); Virtual School Heads:

*"We also need to see action to ensure that those children who do move schools receive sufficient support. As we have previously argued, Virtual School Heads have been highly effective in providing continuity and specialist support for looked after children. We recommend that DfE explore the possibility of deploying Virtual School Heads for Service pupils. They would act as a point of continuity for moving pupils, and work to ensure that service pupils have the support they need"* (Centre for Social Justice, 2016, pg. 13).

Looked-after-children, another group identified by the UK government as vulnerable, are closely tracked, monitored and supported as they move through the education system. Unlike for MCC, LAs are dutybound to record the numbers of LAC; there are 72,670 LAC (including 4,350 adopted children) in the UK currently (Department for Education, 2017), a number not dissimilar to some of the estimations of MCC. No such statistics are routinely kept for military children and MCC are not monitored or tracked as robustly. Virtual schools were piloted by the UK government (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2009) and adopted by many LAs to support and improve the educational achievement of LAC (Ofsted, 2012). Virtual



schools now operate in most LAs as an agency which carefully monitors and tracks the achievement of this vulnerable group.

It appears that perhaps schools in the UK are simply not supported well enough to understand the needs of military children and this impacts upon their ability to plan successful interventions.

#### 2.9.2. How well do educational professionals understand and meet the needs of MCC in school?

Aronson et al (2011) write about the importance of school professionals being aware of military culture and MCC's needs, particularly around transition times or when children arrive mid-year. Support is needed, not only for MCC themselves, but also for their families, the military community, and the rest of the children in the class. However, very little research has been conducted with schools on how well schools understand these issues thus far. Few studies have engaged school staff directly to understand how parental deployment impacts upon behavioural, social and emotional outcomes of MCC in the school setting (Chandra & London, 2010). As an exception to this, Farrell and Collier (2010) spoke to US school staff about the challenges associated with military families. Staff reported the most significant barriers to progress to be: a high student turnover (and associated difficulties with getting children to 'catch up' in their learning), parental characteristics (young, high familial/occupational responsibility), stressors (deployment and transfers), assistance (having little say over important aspects such as housing) and dealing with a sense of loss when parent goes away.

In the US, Stites (2016) surveyed 'early childhood' (ages 3-8) teachers to explore their perceptions of how geographic mobility, parental separation, and socioemotional needs impact upon the educational performance of MCC. Questions focused on comparing children's development between military and non-military children; the extent to which the teachers felt that geographical mobility affected socioemotional and academic development; to what degree teachers considered parental separation to affect their children; and teachers' ideas about what support would be appropriate for this group. A Likert-type survey with additional open-ended questions was emailed to teachers. 63 teachers responded (41% response rate). The Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation—Checklist (TOCA-C) was adapted for use with this study.

Teachers were asked to compare MCC and non-MCC children in 3 domains - concentration, disruptive behaviour, and prosocial behaviour, and no significant overall differences were reported between the two groups. However, teachers did report that MCC's behaviour is likely to change once parent is deployed. Teachers were then asked an open-ended question about the differences between MCC and non-MCC. Several themes emerged, with teachers reporting a lack of stability at home for MCC being the most recurring theme. Teachers also reported a range of other positive and negative differences between the groups. Positive

differences were observed in MCC being more adaptable and more knowledgeable about the world. However, MCC were also reported to be more uncertain about the future and more likely to have behavioural difficulties than their non-MCC counterparts. Teachers were asked about the factors they feel influence the socio-emotional development of MCC, and they reported a range of factors, including parental separation, geographic mobility, changes in family dynamics, uncertainty about the future, lack of a family support system and parent involvement (with their children and with the school). I find it interesting that for this question about risk and protective factors, teachers failed to identify a role for the school or school staff. Teachers were asked about the impact of geographical mobility, and there was general consensus that mobility negatively impacts upon MCC overall, and particularly inhibits their academic development. There was less consensus about how mobility affects MCC socially with some teachers reporting adverse effects and some more positive. Teachers were more in agreement when asked about the effect of parental separation where it was felt that being separated from a deployed parent adversely affects MCC socially and academically. Finally, teachers were asked about what they felt MCC needed when a parent was deployed and upon a parent's return. This question was open-ended. 42 teachers responded to this question, and of those, 16 mentioned additional school support, and a further 5 mentioned counselling. Additional support from peers (n=13) and home (n=14) were also rated as important. Again, I find this finding concerning; less than half (39%) of respondents recognised a specific role for schools in supporting MCC. The authors concluded that:

*"The fundamental findings related to parental separation and geographic mobility are that overall early childhood teachers believe that parental separation negatively impacts academic progress and socioemotional development and geographic mobility negatively impacts academic growth" (pg. 115).*

The results appear to indicate a widespread recognition that MCC are a vulnerable group, however the teachers seem to have focused on instability at home (driven by mobility and parental absence) as the key issue. This may indicate a trend amongst teachers to view the difficulties that MCC face as predominantly 'home issues' and therefore imply that schools are limited in their capacity to help.

Esqueda et al (2012) found that schools often show a lack of understanding around MCC issues. In a US small-scale qualitative study, 31 'district, school and community stakeholders' were interviewed about their knowledge of the issues that MCC face. The sample included social workers, school administrators, community-based military educators (e.g. school liaison officers) and education researchers, but notably, not teachers or the students themselves. Justification from the diverse sample came from researchers adopting an ecological systems approach: *"the research team views the school as ecologically nested within different contexts"* (pg. 7). There were issues with the sampling strategy. The research aimed to collect the views of a variety of stakeholders involved in *"education policy and practice decision makers and leaders"*, but in actual fact, the largest group interviewed were social work students on internships (n=10). There may also be issues of bias within the study.

87% of those interviewed reported a direct family affiliation with the military, and the sole interviewer had also been a military child. The authors do not acknowledge the possibility of this influencing their qualitative data collection or analysis. In their favour however, the interviews were video-recorded and analysed using grounded theory techniques by a team of researchers. Four main themes were found: 1) participants felt that military-connected students have multiple and unique needs and challenges, 2) homegrown school practices were being used to address MCC's challenges in school, 3) schools have responded poorly to MCC's needs and challenges, and 4) the role of schools should be to provide a stable, welcoming and supportive environment for MCC. Interestingly, and in a finding similar to Becker et al (2014), participants noted a reluctance for MCC to reach out for help when struggling, due to perceived stigma:

*“Several participants mentioned that the sociocultural norms of military families might, in part, explain their aversion to seeking help... not wanting to be labeled as weak or incapable of handling situations is a norm shared by many military-connected families who take pride in being able to independently solve problems without outside help” (pg. 15).*

The researchers concluded that although the stakeholders had awareness of the issues involved and needs of MCC, little was actually done in schools to support these children. A variety of reasons for this lack of response was offered by stakeholders, including a lack of understanding or cultural sensitivity on behalf of teachers, and poor identification procedures in schools.

### 2.9.3. School-based interventions for MCC

Of the few papers that exist containing recommendations for schools, some key themes emerge. These are: working preventatively and identifying early any MCC who are struggling to cope; increasing available support and resources; focusing on resilience; and better communication and working cooperatively with parents. The literature shows that intervention with MCC in schools is happening, but there is a distinct lack of empirical evidence about the efficacy of programmes and their impact on child outcomes in both the short and long term. Furthermore, the searches revealed no data from the children themselves regarding their perceptions or helpfulness of their support in school.

### 2.9.4. Whole-school approaches vs specific interventions

Esqueda et al (2012) argued that schools need to play more of a role in supporting MCC, and this is best done by embedding a protective ethos in a school's overall culture:

*“A school's climate - which includes social relationships, a sense of belonging, and feelings of safety - moderates the potential effects of external risk factors on a variety of risky behaviors known to adversely affect academic functioning” (pg. 69).*

This highlights a *systemic* need within schools to consider factors such as social relationships, belonging and safety when planning for MCC.

In a highly transient population such as military families, schools have an important role to play in providing places of stability and safety. De Pedro (2014), in a (US) qualitative study of educational ‘stakeholders’ found that participants agreed that schools play an important role in providing safety, security and stability to MCC:

*“Since military-connected families and students experience life transitions, the stress of deployment, and adjusting to new civilian communities, they may need schools to facilitate stability and consistency in their lives”* (pg. 24).

In addition to the overall school environment, more specific and tailored interventions within schools have also been shown to be useful. Some of these will be outlined below.

#### 2.9.5. Group interventions

In the US, Rush and Akos (2007) designed an in-school ‘psycho-education-counselling’ group intervention for MCC; arguing that putting individuals together who have shared experiences and forming a group can serve as a protective factor, normalise experiences, and provide opportunities to share experiences and coping strategies. However, to date, no evidence regarding the efficacy of such programmes is available. In the UK, less formal group interventions have been run by Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), such as lunchtime clubs, weekly group emotional support clubs (e.g. ‘The Mummies and Daddies go away club’) and group therapeutic story writing sessions (Hampshire County Council, 2014). In the US, De Pedro et al (2014) report the existence of interventions that assemble military children together to discuss the unique challenges they face and provide a forum for safe sharing of concerns. However, to date, I could find no evidence on the efficacy of such programmes, particularly reports from the children themselves.

#### 2.9.6. Engagement with parents

Chandra and London (2010) found that military parents’ attitude to, and engagement with school can be protective factors for MCC’s resilience. Yet, a number of studies have shown that parental engagement in MCC’s schooling can be problematic (Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2011; Farrell & Collier, 2010).

At the heart of resilience is effective relationships, and the relationship between military parents and MCC is thought to be particularly important:

*“A MCC’s resilience is more effectively protected when parents and school professionals partner on behalf of the child and actively share their knowledge and skills”* (Ohye et al, 2016, pg. 873).

However, there are barriers to creating partnerships between military families and schools which impact upon good information sharing. Some of the barriers are practical; similar to single-parents, it may be difficult for non-military spouses to attend school meetings when partners are deployed (e.g. due to childcare) and schools should be aware of individual families' circumstances and adapt accordingly. It has been argued that due to the complex circumstances often present in military families, schools may need to work harder when considering ways to enhance family-school communication for military families:

*"Due to the complex circumstances of military families, frequent conversations may best serve teachers' desires to keep abreast of family changes...Meeting family communication needs in a military setting appears to be layered with extra complexity. Participants voiced the need for educators to take extra steps to ensure that military families are welcomed and informed"* (Farrell & Collier, 2010, pg. 14-15).

Berkowitz et al (2014) concurred that school contact may be harder for military families due to spouses being away and argued that this can impact negatively on parental engagement with schools. This US study compared military and civilian parents' views about school. Specifically, the study examined parental perceptions of school climate and problems, the degree to which schools promote parental involvement, the parents' assessments of the needs of their children's school, and overall parent satisfaction, as part of a larger study collecting parent views. The sample was large; 3914 parents responded to the survey, including 448 military parents (11.4%). An anonymous questionnaire was administered (Core Module and the Military Module of the California School Climate Survey for Parents) by mail and on the internet. The Likert-scale questions yielded quantitative data which was analysed using independent t-tests. Results showed that military-connected parents had a consistently more negative perception of school climate than their civilian counterparts. These differences were consistent across the many aspects of school climate. The largest differences emerged in terms of parental assessments of the quality of programs and activities matching their children's interests, talents, gifts, or special needs and differences persisted across all age-groups of children. However, military-connected parents reported less problems in schools (e.g. vandalism, fighting, alcohol, drugs, gangs, weapons) than the civilian parents did. There was a mixed response when asked about need for services and no differences across the two groups were found for most areas. However, the groups differed for overall satisfaction; nearly 22% of the military families expressed feeling a lack of connection to other families, 34% reported feeling only 'somewhat satisfied' or 'not satisfied at all' with the degree of understanding that staff show them, and military parents reported feeling the school is less responsive to their concerns (32.4%). Additionally, many military parents were either only 'somewhat satisfied' or 'not at all satisfied' with the educational support that the military provided to the school (34%). The study concludes:

*"To achieve a supporting environment in military-connected schools, it is important that parents feel involved in the school and see it as a positive place for them and their children... our findings indicate that military parents had less positive assessments of*

*their children's schools compared with non-military parents. This may be due to the inability of public schools to provide an environment that adequately addresses the unique culture, identity, and needs of military-affiliated children and families"* (pg. 6).

This study again highlights the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and extends this from the pupils to the parents. Results indicate that schools need to do more to actively engage military parents and to make special efforts to accommodate their unique needs. The authors suggest that schools work together to share good practice regarding how different schools manage to engage MC families. The military parents in this survey indicated that receiving information on educational resources for their children was their most pressing need, so raises questions about what schools are doing to support MCC. The study also highlighted a general lack of understanding of military issues in schools:

*"Our observations indicate that often there are gaps in communication between on-base military personnel and community public schools. It is important to bridge these gaps by connecting the military and public schools caring for military students...parents communicated that public schools should be educated as to the specific needs and concerns of military families. In fact, there are very few ways for civilian educators to learn about military culture and the special needs of military families and students"* (pg. e7).

More research into pupil and parent voices may seek to inform schools about the experiences MCC face and the needs they have. In the next and final section, I will address how this gap could be filled by listening to the voices of MCC.

## 2.10. [Listening to the voices of MCC](#)

The rationale for seeking children's voices has a long history, stemming from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which stated that children have a right to express their opinions and for their opinions to be taken into account in matters affecting them. The movement to empower children's voices has continued to grow in momentum since then and remains a key theme in today's legislation around supporting children (see for example, the SEN Code of Practice, DfE/DoH, 2015; or 'Listening to and involving young people', DfE/Home Office, 2014).

Very little research exists in either the US or UK about the experience of being a military child and how it impacts upon school. The vast majority of research in this area relies upon third-person reports of child adjustment, and this leads to inherent difficulties of interpretation and bias: *"surveys should be designed so that children can respond for themselves instead of relying on parental interpretation"* (Stites, 2016, pg. 117).

A small minority of exceptions exist. Since the present study was conducted, a piece of UK research has emerged, published by the Children's Commissioner (2018). In a qualitative study strikingly similar to the present one, first-hand accounts from children on the topics of

mobility, deployment and support were sought. Differences between this study and the present one exist in terms of methodology; the Children's Commissioner research was conducted with 40 children from different age groups (aged 8-15) using focus groups rather than individual interviews. It should also be noted that the research is not peer-reviewed nor presented in an academic paper. However, focus groups revealed a mixture of responses in relation to the issues, but overall, researchers concluded that MCC are a distinct group with unique challenges:

*"What is clear from our research is the unique nature of childhood in a serving military family. The all-encompassing character of a military lifestyle means service children can experience 'growing-up' quite differently from their peers" (pg. 1).*

Regarding mobility, the children reported a range of experiences, from excitement to anxiety. Moving schools was reported to be more stressful than moving house, particularly for younger children, due to the impact a school transition can have on friendships. Many children reported a lack of continuity in their education and having to repeat aspects of the curriculum. With regard to deployment, the research revealed differences between children of different ages in their reaction to deployment:

*"For primary school children, short term and long term parental deployment caused sadness, worry and general unease. It seemed that the physical absence of parents contributed most significantly to creating this distress. The fact that parents were away and not part of family life was upsetting" (pg. 10).*

Younger children appeared to hold a more egocentric view of deployment, missing their parents (particularly during important family times), whereas older children were more concerned about the effects of deployment on their parents and reported concerns about danger or armed conflict. Interestingly, most children felt they were better able to cope with challenges in school rather than at home; lending credence to the argument that schools can operate as protective systems. Children reported changes in familial dynamics whilst their serving parents were deployed. They also reported a need to feel connected and in touch with serving parents and this was often done using social media or sending gifts and packages.

In the US, both Huebner et al (2007, previously discussed in this chapter) and Owlett et al (2015) have sought the views of military-connected adolescents. Owlett et al (2015) interviewed 38 adolescents (aged 12-17) from military families on the topic of information sharing and family communication during the different phases of the deployment cycle (pre, during and post). Responses were rigorously analysed using qualitative coding methods and multiple researchers were used to increase reliability. Using the interview data, three implicit 'macrorules' were devised by the researchers to explain how military families tend to govern their communications with each other during deployments:

- 1) family members limit the information they share with the deployed parent about events at home,
- 2) children are cautious when talking to the at-home parent about the deployment, and,

3) parents filter some deployment-related information from their children.

The researchers proposed that these macrorules are implicitly adopted by military families to govern their communications, putting pressure on MCC to communicate in accordance with these 'rules', which can be maladaptive. In relation to the first macrorule (withholding information shared with the deployed parent), the adolescents expressed feelings of stress, worry and sadness at keeping information back. Information was back for a variety of reasons, including concern for the deployed parent but also to protect the adolescents from expressing powerful feelings. In relation to the second macrorule, the adolescents reported masking negative emotions when communicating with the at-home parent. Some children reported avoiding discussing the deployment or parental absence with their remaining parent for fear of causing upset or additional worry to either parent:

*"Several adolescents attempted to mask their own emotions (fear, sadness) so that these feelings would not spread to the at-home parent" (pg. 151).*

The final macrorule concerned how the adolescents would like information to be shared with them about the parent's deployment. Interestingly, although the adolescents wanted to receive information about their deployed parents, they did not want to know too much about danger or risk. Other children expressed being aware that their non-deployed parents hid information from them. Although the research questions used in this study are not directly linked to the present study, and the sample contains children older than the present research, this study represents one of the very few to directly ascertain the views of MCC. The study reveals the complexities involved with the different strands of family communication when a parent is away, and the direct emotional impact this can have on MCC.

A further study that directly sought the views of MCC was by Knobloch et al (2015) who interviewed 33 military-connected adolescents about their experiences at home as a MCC. The researchers used the (author-devised) theory; the 'relational turbulence' model to guide their questioning. Research questions focused on *change* (what changes (if any) were reported to family life whilst their serving parent was away), *challenge* (what (if any) challenges were reported by the youth during the absence of their parent) and *opportunity* (what positive outcomes were reported as a result of deployment by the adolescents). Similarities exist between this and the present study; in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data was coded using thematic analysis. The adolescents reported a range of changes, challenges and opportunities that arise from deployment. With regard to changes, many adolescents said they took on additional responsibilities at home, shifting family dynamics, or reported changes to the emotional tone at home with higher levels of sadness or a sense of 'incompleteness' with one parent absent. With regard to challenges, adolescents reported disruptions to family routines (27%), emotional difficulties (27%) and missing the deployed family member (21%). Lastly, in relation to opportunity, interestingly, 12% of the sample reported no positive outcomes at all. Other children talked about increased family cohesion (39%) or increased independence (30%). Although a US study, and with children older than those in the present study, this research provides one of the closest in



terms of research questions and methodology. The research provides a unique insight into the challenges that MCC face, in their own words. Furthermore, the authors conclude that relational turbulence model offers a valuable opportunity to explore MCC's experiences in a balanced way:

*"Because prior research has tended to privilege risk rather than resilience...our findings are among the first to illuminate children's positive outcomes in their own words" (pg. 336).*

Although undeniably interesting and relevant research, the study had limitations. The children were recruited through a military summer camp and thus capture the views of a selective group, at a specific point in time. It would be interesting to know more about the demographics of children who attend military summer camps. They could, for example, come from families that are very pro-military. It would be interesting to compare these views with the perspectives of children from parents who were unwilling or unable to send their children to the camp.

The last study to directly explore MCC's views comes from the UK. Jain et al (2016) collected qualitative data using an online questionnaire from 171 adolescents (85 girls and 86 boys) aged 11–16 years, exploring views on the best and worst aspects of their father's military role. The researchers used content analysis to code the data into themes. Participants reported that financial benefits, and pride/respect for the job were the best things about having a father in the military (25% each). However, 61% of the sample reported the worst thing about having a father in the military is the lack of contact (61%), with a further 18% of participants stating that there is nothing negative about their father's job. The adolescents' views on relocating were mixed, with similar numbers reporting it as either a good or bad thing. The variety of the children's responses is interesting and indicates a continuum of feelings that children have about having a parent in the military. It would have been interesting to see the responses analysed further (e.g. by gender) or to have asked the children to rate how much each factor affected them. As the data was collected using questionnaire only, there were no opportunities to probe answers in depth or ask follow up questions. The authors conclude with a call for more research (similar to the nature of the present study):

*"A more in-depth qualitative study should be attempted, perhaps with interviews, using the same approach as this one; to target the children and adolescents themselves, rather than the parents, in order to further understand their hardships and how best to try and address them" (pg. 3).*

In summary, studies which directly seek the views of this group are rare. Exceptions to this largely come from the US and focus on an adolescent population. However, such studies have highlighted that MCC report aspects of their lifestyles to be problematic and confirm previous adult-centred views that MCC may be vulnerable and in need of additional support.

## 2.10. Chapter summary

Research suggests that MCC are a vulnerable group which faces many challenges, most notably, high levels of mobility and parental deployments. We can ascertain from the literature that these challenges, although not without potential benefits, can lead to negative academic, social and emotional outcomes for MCC. However, gaps in the literature remain.

In particular, we know little about the lived experiences of MCC in school. Although schools are given a pupil premium allowance (see introduction for more about the SPP) to meet the needs of MCC, there is little clarity about the needs of this group or how best to meet them. More research is needed to identify and describe the unique educational needs and circumstances of military children as a critical first step toward supporting MCC. This information would bring greater awareness to the strengths and challenges for military children and allow policy makers and educational professionals to more appropriately design and direct resources:

*"Too often, teachers lack understanding of the changes that face children in military families. This lack of understanding may lead to inadequate or non-existent school support systems for children in military families" (Russo & Fallon, 2015, pg. 411).*

Furthermore, the largest gap in the literature appears to be what MCC themselves perceive the challenges and benefits to be, and how these impact upon them. The vast majority of literature on this topic reports on perceptions of the needs and outcomes of MCC *by those around them*. The limited literature that exists on MCC outcomes, educational experiences and wellbeing, consists of third-party reports, usually by parents or school staff, with little attention given to hearing the voices of MCC themselves. This thesis presents the chance to study the unique circumstances surrounding this large but underrepresented and relatively unknown group of military children and their families by speaking to the children themselves about their positive and negative experiences of being a UK MCC.

The next chapter will outline the methodological approach to the present study, including a detailed explanation of the study design and procedures.

### 3. Methodology

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#### 3.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter presents the methodology chosen for the present study. Firstly, the reader is reminded of the research aims and questions. My methodological orientation and philosophical assumptions are presented, followed by an acknowledgement of my position within the research and ethical considerations. The chapter then proceeds with a practical account of the research; including a description of sampling, data collection and procedures. Finally, the chapter outlines the method of data analysis; thematic analysis, with a balanced appreciation of this method as well as justification for its use.

#### 3.2. Research aims and questions

As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, there is a scarcity of literature representing the lived experiences of primary-school-age military-connected-children (MCC) in the UK. The overarching aims therefore for the present study were to contribute to this topic by listening to and representing MCC's views on growing up within a military family, and to explore their perceptions regarding a number of key topics. Primarily, this thesis is about promoting children's voices.

There were three main motivations for the research aims. Firstly, I wanted to explore how MCC make sense of their experiences, including their perceptions of any challenges and how they overcome these, as well as any positive messages they want to communicate about their lifestyle. Secondly, I wanted the findings to be useful and informative for professionals working with this group, namely educators and educational psychologists. Thirdly, I wanted to add to the very limited research base and offer suggestions for complimentary research on this topic.

The research questions that arose from the aim are:

1. What are the experiences (positive and negative) of MCC growing up with a parent in the military?
2. How, if at all, do MCC feel that being from a military background has affected them educationally, socially or emotionally?
3. How can children from military families be best supported in schools and families?

##### 3.2.1. The evolution of the research aims and questions

The research aims and questions evolved along the course of this project. Initially, the research aim was to collect the voices of children *and school staff* regarding being raised within a military family, in order to explore the implications this lifestyle may have upon

MCC's experiences of school and education. The original research questions that aligned with this aim were:

1. How do MCC feel about their experiences of having a parent (or parents) in the military and how, if at all, do they feel their backgrounds have affected them academically, socially and emotionally?
2. What kinds of support, if any, do MCC receive in school and how do they feel about the support offered?
3. How have schools developed their offers of support for MCC and how do school staff feel about the effectiveness of support offered in their schools?
4. Does the support offered in schools to MCC currently meet the needs of this group? Are there any gaps in provision? Is there potential for improvement?

However, the research aims and questions evolved. As can be seen from the original research questions, I had hoped to collect supplementary data from schools (using focus groups) to explore school staff's understanding of the needs of MCC, and their opinions regarding their schools' current offers of support for this group. However, over the course of the project, the focus of the research moved away from schools and exclusively toward facilitating pupil voice, which led to a revision of the research aims and questions. This decision was made for two main reasons. Firstly, despite attempting a range of recruitment strategies (involving letters, emails and personal approaches from school link EPs), schools were very reluctant to engage with the research and I did not manage to recruit staff participants to offer a school perspective. Secondly, the review of the literature revealed that the gap in the existing knowledge relates to child voice (see Chapter 2). The majority of research to date on MCC presents child outcomes as reported by the adults around them. I became keen to avoid adding to the third-person accounts of MCC's wellbeing and instead to promote and emphasise child voices in my thesis. After discussions with my supervisors, I felt that adding adult voices may 'muddy the picture' and focusing exclusively on the children's perspectives would place the child participants centre stage which has rarely been done before and would provide a unique contribution to the topic.

In addition to these changes, the overall focus of the research was also adjusted over the course of data collection. Initially, my focus was predominantly on school, as represented by my initial research questions. I was interested in how MCC adjust and cope in school with the challenges their lifestyle can bring, and hence, what lessons schools should learn about how to provide support and tailor intervention. As a former teacher, this remained my focus until I began data collection. However, during the interviews, it became apparent that the participants wanted to talk about wider issues; including their friendships, their emotions, their families and their future. Fortunately, having adopted semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, my methodology was sufficiently flexible to allow the children to take some ownership over our conversations and it became clear early on that there were many issues that were important to the children that were about their lifestyle in general, and not just about their experiences in education. For example, the children wanted to talk about the

repeated absence of their fathers, the impact of repeatedly moving home and the emotions they experience in relation to deployment. This became a thesis about listening to children talk about their experiences of being a MCC and how this impacts upon all aspects of their lives. For this reason, my research questions altered in terms of their scope and direction. Rather than being wholly focused on school, my research questions broadened into the following:

1. What are the experiences (positive and negative) of MCC growing up with a parent in the military?
2. How, if at all, do MCC feel that being from a military background has affected them educationally, socially or emotionally?
3. How can children from military families be best supported in schools and families?

Despite these adjustments, the overarching aims for the present study remained the same throughout; to listen to and represent children's views on growing up within a military family, and to explore their perceptions regarding a number of key topics. In total, I conducted in-depth interviews with eight children from military families, so in this respect, the overall aims were achieved.

### 3.3. Methodological orientation and philosophical approach

The language and terminology around methodology is complex. Many different terms, such as 'axiology', 'ontology', 'epistemology', 'methodology', 'method' and 'paradigm' are used by researchers to discuss and debate arguments around the existence of 'truth' and knowledge, and how to capture it. To clarify my research position, I referred to models offered by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Bryman (2012) that describe the research process and different paradigms within it. Using these models, my overall approach to methodology in this study is summarised in Figure 2 below, and further expanded upon in the following sections.

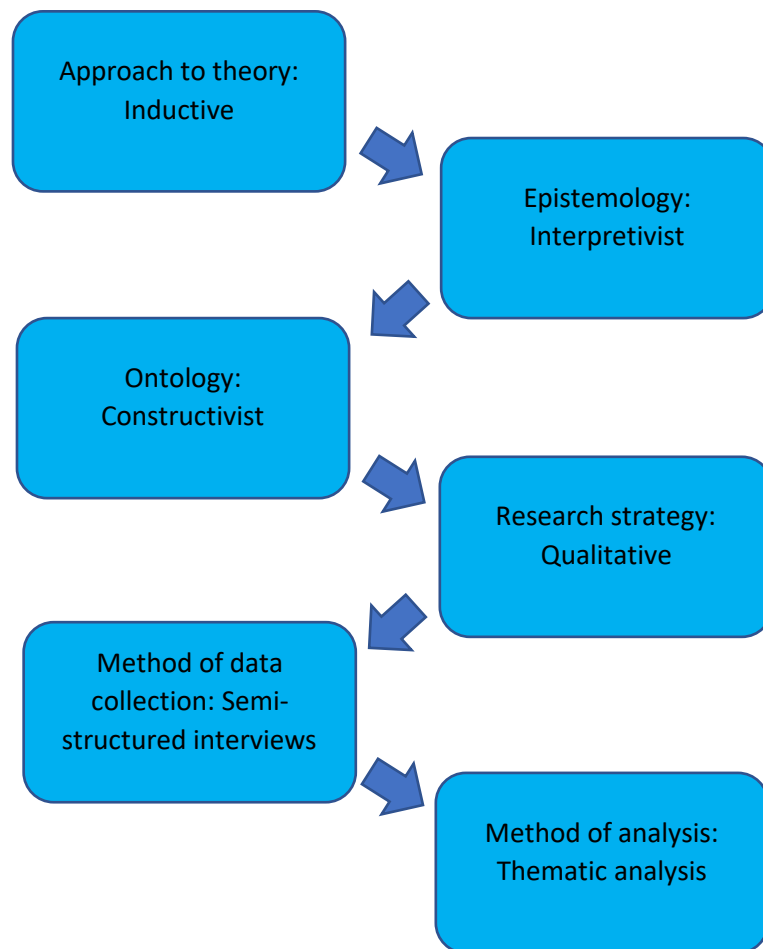


Figure 2: Methodological approach to this study

### 3.3.1. Approach to theory

*“Theory is important to the social researcher because it provides a backcloth and rationale for the research that is being conducted. It also provides a framework within which social phenomena can be understood and research findings can be interpreted”* (Bryman, 2012, pg. 20).

I present my approach to theory first in Figure 2 because, as illustrated by the above quote, a researcher’s approach to theory provides the overall framework from which a research project is conceived, designed and conducted. There are many ways to discuss theory, but in the present study, I shall focus on the difference between *deductive* and *inductive* theory. In a deductive approach, a researcher uses what is already known about a topic to develop a hypothesis (or hypotheses) which is then explored using empirical scrutiny. However, the present study mainly utilised an inductive approach whereby the reverse is true; data was collected (in this case, using interviews), from which inferences were made and theory therefore becomes the *outcome* or product of research.

However, it is worth noting that deductive and inductive approaches are not always exclusive (Bryman, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that although I did not approach data collection with any set hypotheses, my reading of the existing literature, and my previous experiences with MCC led me to make certain assumptions that will have influenced the process and informed my choice of research questions (see later section on my role and position within the research). For example, I acknowledge that I had preconceptions around some aspects of military lifestyle being challenging for MCC. I took measures to guard against the possibility of my existing views biasing data collection and analysis, in order to stick as closely as possible to an inductive approach. For example, an interview topic guide was chosen, rather than a set schedule of questions, to allow the participants freedom in guiding their own interviews. The guide was also refined throughout the data collection process, in response to the data collected (see method section for more on this). Also, during data analysis, I chose to start by coding the participants' responses, before returning to my research questions (see later in chapter for more on analysis).

### 3.3.2. Epistemology and Ontology

In designing and conducting this research, I make certain assumptions regarding the nature of our world (ontology) and our knowledge about it (epistemology). In its simplest terms, ontology considers the nature of reality and is concerned with questions about what we understand to be 'real', whereas epistemology considers how knowledge can be legitimately obtained and understood. It is important to clarify our beliefs within these concepts in any form of social research, as well as acknowledge our position as researchers, because the subject of our attention is people rather than natural science and is therefore potentially open to a degree of subjectivity.

The two main epistemological positions are positivism and interpretivism. Positivism advocates the "*application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality*" (Bryman, 2012, pg. 28) and generally refers to research that is considered to be objective, often involving quantitative approaches and the collection of statistical data. The current research was designed from the contrasting position of interpretivism. Interpretivists take a different view of knowledge from positivists and tend to view the subject matter of 'people' as fundamentally different to entities in the natural sciences. There are many differences between the two positions. One important difference for me can be explained in terms of research motivation. Bryman (2012) describes positivist researchers as concerned with *explanations* of human behaviour whereas interpretivist researchers seeks to *understand* it. To apply this to the present study, I was less interested in how MCC behave (e.g. in the classroom, at home, with friends) but more interested in their own understanding and perceptions of their lifestyles. I hold an interpretivist view in that I am not seeking to identify or represent absolute truth (which would be more typical of positivism) but instead, the children's interpretations of truth as applied to their lives. This thesis is concerned with the lived experiences of a small number of children.

Social ontology describes beliefs about the nature of social entities. The main dichotomy here is between *objectivism* and *constructivism*. Objectivism holds that “*social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors*” (Bryman, 2012, pg. 33). In contrast to this, my ontological stance in this research was social constructivist and holds that reality is inherently subjective and a universal understanding of human psychological experiences is therefore impossible as they are so contextually bound. Within this paradigm is an acceptance that many realities can exist simultaneously, which I think is particularly relevant to the present study where children may simultaneously hold both negative and positive views about their military background, which may align or contrast with the views of their siblings, peers or parents. A core idea within social constructivism is that “*reality is constantly in flux as it is negotiated and renegotiated through our experiences*” (Spencer, Pryce & Walsh, 2014, pg. 86); this idea is particular pertinent to my topic as I attempted to represent the children’s realities as they saw them, through their lived experiences. I also must acknowledge that, having not been a military child myself, and as an adult, I had a degree of separation from the children and inevitably added to the construction of the children’s realities as I interacted with them during interviews, and later, through data analysis. As a researcher, it is important to recognise that my role and position within the research was evident in the collecting and analysis of data, and will be fully considered later in this chapter.

### 3.3.3. Research strategy

A qualitative approach was chosen for this inquiry as it seemed the most appropriate to meet my research questions:

*“The aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations”* (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999, p.216).

The present study was more concerned with understanding social life, rather than measuring it. This research seeks to *explore* rather than *confirm*; a key difference between qualitative and quantitative methods (Atieno, 2009). Furthermore, a qualitative strategy fit with my overall methodological approach as outlined above; qualitative researchers tend to favour inductive or ‘bottom up’ approaches which view knowledge as constructed and emerging.

A qualitative approach also was the most appropriate to address the aims of this study; to collect data that contributes to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, with an emphasis on the empowerment of participants. A qualitative approach was appropriate here as it is concerned with the meaning that people make of their lives and experiences, and the structures around them (Atieno, 2009). In the present study, qualitative analysis seemed the most appropriate ‘fit’ as it attempts to deal with “*naturally complex, dynamic, fluid, and messy concepts...to do with making sense of experiential challenges*” (Thorne, 2014, pg. 2). This seemed relevant to the present study as my research design included finding out about multiple aspects of the children’s experiences; including their



thoughts and feelings about their lives in general, and experiences of family and school. I wanted to elicit a rich and detailed dataset, and this was more likely to be achieved through qualitative data collection techniques, such as interviews (Spencer et al, 2014).

### 3.4. My role and position within the research, and ethical considerations

Axiology is concerned with *“how values and assumptions of the researcher influence the scientific process”* (Spencer et al, 2014, pg. 83) and how these values shape my actions, emotions and expectations; all of which inevitably play a role in the research process. For example, my experience as a teacher, feeling out of my depth when working with military children, and living within my local community of civilian and service families, led to this choice of topic. I recognise that these experiences and my orientations will have influenced many aspects of the research process, including my interview topic guide. Researchers select topics of significance to them, and as such, we should accept and acknowledge that our core beliefs around our subject matters play a role in how our research is conducted. Before embarking upon this project, I acknowledge that I had some core beliefs around MCC. For example, I believed that certain aspects of their lifestyle (e.g. mobility, parental deployment) may be challenging, and for some, difficult. I also believed that not all schools are appropriately equipped in terms of understanding or support for MCC.

Moreover, in line with my social constructivist stance, I adopt the belief that knowledge is actively constructed between participant and researcher (Kukla, 2000). I therefore recognise that my analysis involved my own interpretation of what the children tell me. In order to address the inherent bias possible within this process, I adopted a systemic and rigorous technique (thematic analysis) with which to analyse the findings (see later in this chapter for a detailed discussion of thematic analysis). Furthermore, I constantly reflected on my role within the process by keeping detailed field notes after each interview and discussion, to acknowledge my thoughts and feelings as I went along.

I recognise the influence I had over the data collected, particularly within this study where I approached child participants as an adult, and may consequently have been viewed as an authority figure. This raised a number of ethical concerns, which were anticipated in advance by the researcher and addressed in accordance with the University of Bristol’s Ethics Committee.

As the primary focus of my research was to elicit and respect children’s voices, the empowerment of my participants was key. I was aware of the potential imbalance of power within the research design and took steps to reduce this at all stages of the process. For example, all participants were given information letters to introduce the study, with my photograph and name on (see Appendix 3 for example). This was important in terms of introducing the study and achieving informed consent. Throughout the whole process, I used my Christian name with the participants, to consciously separate myself from their teachers and other adult authority figures. Prior to, and during the interviews, I emphasised to the

participants their position as experts and knowledge-holders in the subject matter and contrasted this with my own position as a naïve bystander. The children were given power in terms of deciding the location of their interviews (home or school) and seating arrangements. Participants were also offered control over aspects of the data collection through the use of an interview topic guide and creative methods (see methods and procedure section). My overall chosen approach of qualitative inquiry has been described by some as conducive to the reduction of power inequality:

*“Qualitative inquiry...proposes to reduce power differences and encourages disclosure and authenticity between researchers and participants. It clearly departs from the traditional conception of quantitative research, whereby the researcher is the ultimate source of authority and promotes the participants’ equal participation in the research process”* (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009, pg. 279).

### 3.4.1. Ethical approval

A research proposal, including detailed ethical considerations, was submitted to and approved by the University of Bristol Ethics Committee in April 2017. Subsequent amendments to the sampling strategy were submitted and approved in September and November 2017 (see next section on sampling and participants for details of changes).

Due to my participants’ young age, the most notable ethical considerations concerned the vulnerability of my sample. I used a range of strategies to address this. For example, I was careful to achieve informed consent by checking before and during interviews that my participants understood my research aims and their rights as participants. All participants were given information packs prior to interview, including detailed information sheets and consent forms (see Appendices 3 and 4), which were signed in advance by each participant’s parent. I also went through the consent forms with the participants again prior to interview, reminding them of key points. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the research, the limits of anonymity and confidentiality, and how their data would be stored and used. All participants were told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that they could withdraw their data for up to a month after interview. All of the participants were happy for their interviews to be audio-recorded. I had strategies in place to protect their identities, including using pseudonyms.

In the ethics form, I considered the potential harm or risks to participants, one of which was the potential for a child to become upset during an interview if the conversation strayed into difficult or emotive topics for the children. My plans for such an event were to draw upon my experiences as a teacher and trainee Educational Psychologist by providing reassurance, asking open questions framed sensitively, reminding the child about the voluntary nature of their participation and offering to stop the interview. I also planned to speak with a member of staff or parent following the interview. This procedure was required for one of the

interviews (Molly), and I acted in accordance with the plans. Molly’s interview is discussed in greater depth during the discussion chapter.

### 3.5. Sampling and participants

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants. All primary schools in my LA with 50% or more pupils on roll being from a military background (n=10), were initially contacted by letter and emails to the Headteacher and SENCos. Contact letters and information sheets for schools can be found in Appendix 5. Following low take-up, schools were contacted again in a chaser email and then again directly by their link EPs. One school eventually consented to allow access to participants. A visit then took place to the school, in which I visited each Key Stage 2 classroom and presented the research directly to the children (approximately 240 pupils), as well as handing out information packs and displaying posters. This was followed up by an email to each parent. Although the children appeared keen to take part, ultimately only four children from this school became participants.

Due to low take-up, the recruitment strategy was then expanded to include a number of military charities and organisations; the Armed Forces Charity (SSAFA), the Army Families Federation (AFF) and Army Welfare Service Information Services (HIVEs). All of the organisations listed above have representatives in the local area but unfortunately none were able to assist with recruiting families.

In response to these challenges, the recruitment strategy was then expanded again to include recruitment through social media. Facebook was used to post information about the project to local military community groups. Each of these changes required a resubmission to and approval from Bristol University’s Ethics Committee. A summary timeline of key events in the research can be found in Figure 3.

Eventually, through these methods, eight children were recruited to take part in individual interviews. Four children were recruited following the school visit, two children took part following Facebook posts, and two more were recruited through personal contacts. A summary of the demographic information of participants can be found in Table 1. To protect the anonymity of the children, each child was given a pseudonym prior to analysis. Please see brief vignettes describing each participant in Appendix 6.

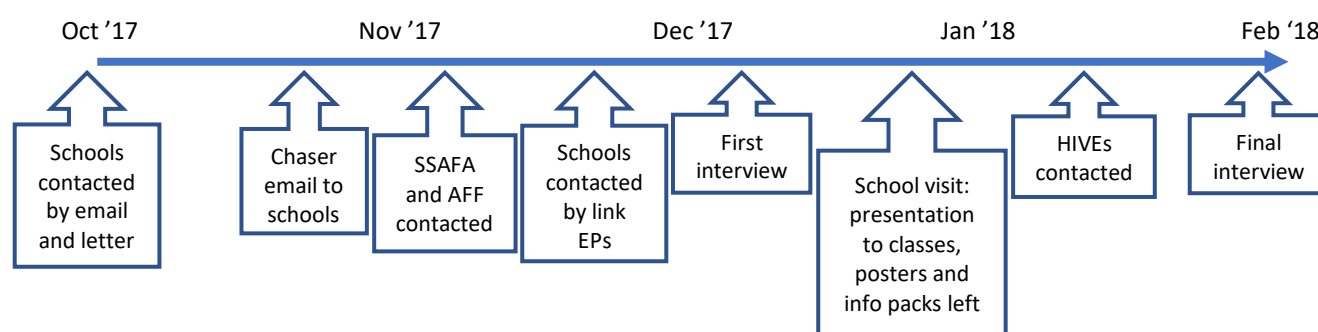


Figure 3: Summary timeline of key events in the research

Participant pseudonym	Sex	Age	Year group	Type of school attended	Military affiliation	Number of house moves	Number of school moves
Luke	M	10	6	Mainstream primary	RAF	3	3
Ivy	F	10	6	Mainstream primary	Army	6	3
Ellie	F	11	6	Mainstream primary	Army	6	6
Kai	M	8	4	Mainstream primary	Army	4	4
Thomas	M	10	6	Mainstream primary	Army	5	4
Molly	F	7	3	Mainstream primary	Army	5	5
Charlotte	F	10	6	Independent residential	Army	8	5
Belle	F	10	6	Mainstream primary	Army	5	3

*Table 1: A summary of participant demographic information*

### 3.6. Methods and procedure

To gain a deep understanding of the social realities of my participants, and to gather rich and detailed data, individual semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate method of data collection. Individual interviews are particularly useful to support an interpretivist approach (Thorne, 2014) due to their capacity to probe in-depth and capture evolving data through discussion. In line with an exploratory approach, I chose to use a general topic guide (see Appendix 7) to shape my interactions with the children which combines structure with flexibility, rather than an interview schedule which would have been too rigid and restrictive. My inductive approach means that I was not aiming to confirm or dispute existing hypothesis, so allowing interviews to evolve in this way felt appropriate, as well as empowering for the children as they were able to steer the course of the discussion more than would be possible with other methods. This approach also allowed me to ask open-ended questions with follow-up questions to seek clarification and explore issues in greater depth, when needed.

I was keen to make the experience as enjoyable and non-threatening for my young participants as possible. I was also inspired by ideas found in arts-based research (e.g. Knowles and Cole, 2008) and narrative life-story approaches (e.g. Rose, 2012). Arts-based approaches are *“the systematic use of the artistic process...as a primary way of understanding*

*and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies"* (Knowles & Cole, 2008, pg. 29) and can be particularly useful for this age group as they are creative, fun and can be perceived as less threatening than direct questioning. Using a narrative approach, Rose (2012) describes 'wallpaper work' whereby children tell their 'life journeys' by creating sequences on wallpaper (pg. 30). Rose describes how this process helps children to discuss and reflect on their experiences as they are co-constructed with the researcher on rolls of wallpaper. Therefore, I combined the interviews with another, visual task where each child and I made a brief timeline of their lives, including their house and school moves as well as other significant events such as their father's deployments. Recording their life journeys in this way allowed me to ask questions about different parts of their journey, as well as for children to reflect on their lives as a whole. Children were given control over how to represent their timelines, whether pictorially or in writing, where to start (now or at the beginning of their lives) and whether they would like to create them or for me to scribe.

In summary, all child participants took part in the following tasks:

- 1) An ice-breaker/getting to know you task. Each participant was asked to tell the researcher three important facts about themselves, to explore whether children would choose to mention the fact that they are from a military background.
- 2) Creating a visual timeline of their lives, detailing places they had lived in, schools they had attended and times their serving parent had been away from the family home.
- 3) Questions about their lives, including the good and bad things about their parent's job in the military; if, and how, they think they have been affected by the military lifestyle (positively or negatively) and what has helped them through any difficult times; any additional support they have received in school as a result of their military backgrounds and their thoughts on this; and their ideas about how schools could improve their offer to this group.
- 4) The children were given opportunities to ask questions and discuss other information they felt was important.

I met with each child once. Interviews took place in locations selected by the participants (either home or school) and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Interviews took place between December 2017 and February 2018.

### 3.7. Analysis of data

Thematic analysis (TA) is a *"systematic approach for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns – themes – across a dataset...and is now a recognised, accepted and more widely discussed method"* (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 178). Although the thematic coding of qualitative data has a longstanding history within social sciences, thematic analysis as a named approach was first developed by Holton, a physicist and historian of science, in the

1970s, and *"has only recently been recognised as a distinctive method with a clearly outlined set of procedures"* (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 178). This method was selected in order to add depth to the current understandings of the subject through its ability to identify and report themes within the data and systematically interpret the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted in an inductive, data-driven fashion to suit the exploratory nature of the study.

The TA approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) was selected for use in this study. Braun and Clarke's interpretation of TA involves six phases:

1. Reading and familiarisation; taking note of items of particular interest
2. Complete coding across the dataset
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes by producing a thematic map
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Writing and finalising analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2013)

Phase 1 involved immersion in the data through the repeated listening to of interviews and reading and re-reading of transcripts whilst making notes regarding the overall feel and tone of the participant's interviews, as well as noting phrases or statements of interest. This initial stage of 'noticing' is *"observational and casual, rather than systematic and precise"* (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 205). The first stage of analysis was completed twice; once immediately after the interview was conducted (with 'noticings' recorded as verbal field notes using a voice recorder) and again after the transcription of each individual interview. Analysing qualitative data using this method offers an advantage over quantitative analysis whereby researchers must collect all data prior to beginning analysis. This process allowed for refinement throughout the data collection. For example, in the first interview, Luke talked comparatively about his experiences of attending different schools with more and less MCC on roll and the impact this had on him. Luke felt strongly that he preferred to attend schools where there are more MCC on roll. Although this subject was not part of the original topic guide, it seemed pertinent to the overall research questions and was something that Luke felt passionately about. It was therefore added to the topic guide and discussed in subsequent interviews.

For later phases of analysis, the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 Pro was used to code the data and search for themes. NVivo was used as a means to code the complete dataset. Coding the complete dataset was an inductive process by which anything and everything of relevance to the research questions was identified and coded across all interview transcripts. In line with TA, many data extracts were coded in several different ways. Whilst coding the dataset, both semantic codes (based in the semantic meaning in the data) and researcher-derived codes (interpretative and implicit) were used. Braun and Clarke (2013) use the metaphor of an analyst as a sculptor rather than an archaeologist to explain this process:

*"Two sculptors with different tools, techniques and experiences would produce (somewhat) different sculptures from the same piece of marble. Likewise, two researchers would code the same dataset somewhat differently" (pg. 207).*

143 initial codes were created across the entire dataset of child interviews, with 23-68 initial codes per interview. As illustrations of the process, some example pages of data, with the assigned initial codes can be found in Appendix 8. A complete set of initial codes can be found in Appendix 9.

Once the data was coded using NVivo 11 Pro, the next stage of analysis involved grouping the individual codes into themes and subthemes. To do this, the initial codes were printed and physically arranged together in groups with similar codes to produce sub-themes. This process was time-consuming and involved a considerable degree of reflection. At this stage, each initial code was either grouped into a subtheme with other codes, amalgamated into another code, or discarded (e.g. due to lack of strength or relevance to the research aim or questions), leaving a final tally of 119 codes. During this process, I met with my university thesis supervisor to discuss the codes and emerging themes. The research questions were also used to inform the eventual organisation of the codes into themes. The codes were organised into three themes. Each theme contained 6-8 subthemes and each subtheme contained between 2 and 11 codes. Tables showing each code and its position within the themes can be found in Appendix 10.

### 3.7.1. Justification of thematic analysis

A range of analysis methods were considered for the present study. Please see Appendix 11 for an illustration of these and my reflections on their relevance to this project. Thematic analysis (TA) was ultimately selected as the most appropriate method for analysis for several reasons:

- TA is a highly flexible approach; it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions or epistemological or ontological stances. This research included data from different sources (interview and life journey pictures). Furthermore, originally, I had also hoped to collect supplementary questionnaire data from schools. I therefore needed a suitably flexible method that could cope with the uncertainty of my data collection.
- TA can be used to answer almost any type of research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Again, as my research involved a number of different research questions (about the children's experiences but also about how schools can identify and meet needs), TA seemed flexible enough to meet requirements.
- TA is suitable for use in both large and small datasets. At the outset of data collection, it was unknown how many participants would be recruited, from different samples (schools and children). I needed a method that was flexible enough to cope with the uncertainty of sample size.

- In TA, themes can be generated using either an inductive data-driven, 'bottom-up' approach, on the basis of what is found in the data, or from a deductive 'top-down' fashion, whereby the researcher utilises the data to explore particular chosen ideas or theories (Alhojailan, 2012). Indeed, both methods can be used within the same analysis. Again, this flexibility appealed due to the lack of pre-existing research literature with this group. Both approaches were used in my methodology; I took an inductive approach to the analysis in that I started from the children's responses and coded accordingly. However, I did have research questions that I returned to, once the data was coded.
- TA as an approach is not tied to any particular theoretical construct and is relatively simple and straightforward to use, compared to some other labour-intensive qualitative analytic methods. Given the time constraints involved in this project, it seemed a practical, appropriate and realistic choice to produce meaningful data in a short time frame.
- TA produces findings that are accessible to a wide audience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was important as at the time of design, my intention was to produce information for schools on the basis of their responses.

It must be noted that there have been criticisms of TA. Like any qualitative method, it is difficult to accurately replicate (Creswell, 2013). It has also been criticised for lacking a distinct and identifiable approach (Bryman, 2012). As with any method of analysis that relies on interpretation, other criticisms centre on its subjectivity (Alhojailan, 2012). To counteract this, it is good practice in TA to use crosschecking to improve inter-rater reliability: *"validating themes in the early and late stages of data analysis is essential. It has been suggested that the researcher should involve an outside reviewer during this early stage to evaluate and identify themes"* (Alhojailan, 2012, pg. 44). In this instance, my thesis supervisor performed this role. After the initial coding, my codes were shared and discussed with my supervisor before they were grouped into themes and subthemes.

### 3.8. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the methodological approach to the present study. This research was conceived and designed from a largely inductive stance. Interpretivist and constructivist principles and assumptions underlie the qualitative research design and informed the selected methods of data collection and analysis using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Ethical concerns, and planned responses to these were noted and explained. The next chapter will present an account of the data collected, and how it was coded and analysed into themes, before proceeding to a discussion of the main findings.



## 4. Findings

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### 4.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the present study. The data from eight child interviews were combined and analysed using thematic analysis (see Chapter 3). Vignettes describing the children can be found in Appendix 6 and participant demographics can be found in Table 1 (Chapter 3). Three boys participated in the research: Luke (aged 10), Kai (aged 8) and Thomas (aged 10). Five girls were interviewed: Ivy (aged 10), Ellie (aged 11), Molly (aged 7) Charlotte (aged 10) and Belle (aged 10). All of the children attend mainstream primary schools, with the exception of Charlotte who attends an independent boarding school. Ellie and Kai are brother and sister and attend the same school. Luke attends a different school nearby. Belle, Molly, Thomas and Ivy attend a school in a town within the same county.

As stated in Chapter 3, 119 codes emerged from the data which were organised into three themes, each containing several subthemes. Each code, subtheme and theme were assigned a title. Where pertinent, direct quotes from the children have been used as titles, to position the data as closely to the children's voices as possible. This chapter includes both statements made by the children, and my interpretation of what the children told me, in line with my interpretivist stance. The chapter presents thematic maps and descriptions of each theme (including subthemes) in turn, illustrated by the children's voices as quotes.

Theme 1 is entitled, *'Negative impacts of growing up in a military family'* and encapsulates the children's responses which relate to the downsides of being a military-connected child (MCC). The children talked about negatives in relation to their social relationships (e.g. with family members or friends), challenges associated with the transient nature of their lifestyle, the impacts on their learning, and negative emotions. I have included 'having mixed feelings' as a subtheme in itself, but it is worth mentioning that there was a considerable variety in children's responses on many topics; this will be referred to throughout.

Theme 2 is entitled, *"Not letting me down in life": the benefits and opportunities of growing up in a military family'*. The theme title contains a quote from one of the children (Charlotte). This theme presents participant-identified positives or advantages to a military lifestyle, and includes reference to practical benefits (e.g. money), positive strengths or qualities, forming new relationships, spending quality family time together, and feelings of pride regarding their father's job.

The final theme, *'What helps: promoting coping strategies and building resilience'* captures the children's thoughts about how MCC are, and should be supported at home and at school. This theme contains the children's responses around maintaining a sense of connection with lost or absent loved ones, having access to timely and appropriate information, and feeling supported through their relationships with others. The children also talked about how their needs for support change over time.

## 4.2. Themes and subthemes

The following sections will present the themes and subthemes for the present study.

### Theme 1: Negative impacts of growing up in a military family

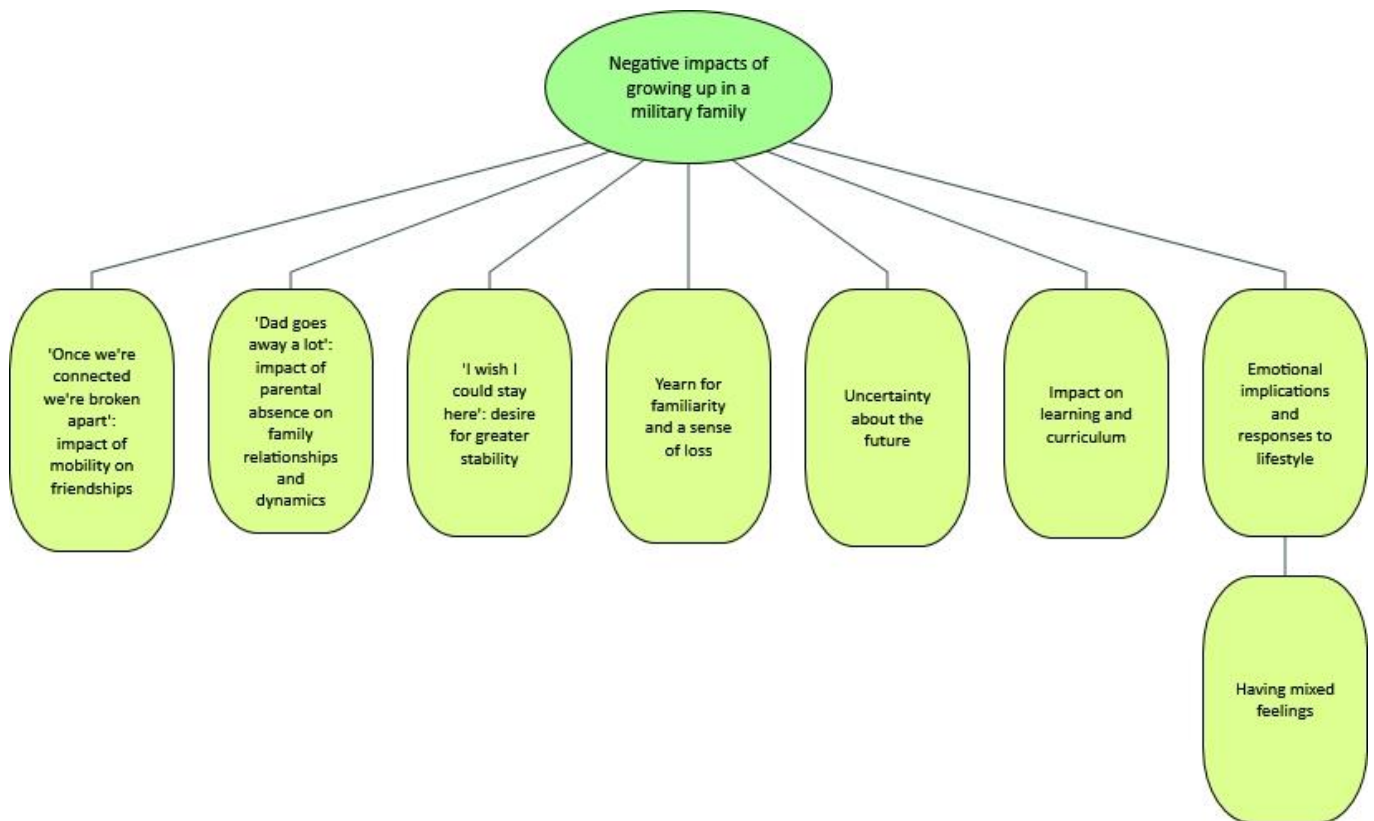


Figure 4: Thematic map for Theme 1

Researcher: *What are the hard things about Dad being in the military?*

Luke: *Uh, the hard things are, mmm, quite a lot of them.*

This theme captures the children's statements about the drawbacks associated with their military lifestyle. As can be seen from Luke's quote above, the children identified a number of negatives associated with their lives as MCC. This theme includes eight subthemes, which I will present in turn. Within this theme, the children talked about difficulties in relation to their friendships and relationships with family members, their desire for greater stability and yearning for familiarity. Some children expressed a sense of loss when talking about the frequent changes that they have experienced. Within this theme I have also included codes which were not specifically identified by the children as negative impacts of their lifestyle but include my interpretation. For example, when asked directly, none of the children believed

that their status as a MCC had impacted negatively on their learning, however, during the interviews all of the children talked about either repeating or missing learning opportunities due to mobility, so I have considered this a negative impact and included these codes in this theme. Lastly, I will present the children's voices on the emotional implications of their lifestyle and how their thoughts and feelings affect their lives.

#### *Subtheme 1a: 'Once we're connected we're broken apart': impact of mobility on friendships*

Friendship was a significant topic for all of the children and one they returned to repeatedly throughout our conversations. All of the children expressed sadness or difficulty with friendships that had arisen due to mobility. For some, the ending of friendships was the most difficult thing about their lifestyle and is captured by the quote that titles this subtheme:

*Molly: I sort of settle in for like a year and then we, and then me and other people start making friends through that year. And then when we're just connected we're broken apart.*

Other children talked about the friends they had left behind and how it can be difficult to keep in touch:

*Kai: The bad things are leaving my other friends behind. Yeah. I still miss my other friend from B [previous town].*

*Researcher: Do you ever see your other friend from B?*

*Kai: No. Never seen them again.*

The children expressed different negative emotions about the impact mobility has had on their friendships. Ivy expressed guilt at leaving her friends behind, but the predominant emotion expressed by the children was sadness:

*Belle: I felt quite upset because I made loads of friends there and I was leaving them behind.*

*Thomas: I make loads of friends and then I just have to leave them.*

And:

*Molly: So we have to move in places, move places a lot a lot, a lot, and that's that.*

*Researcher: And what do you think about that?*

*Molly: Sad because I, I don't get to see my friends ever again.*

Some of the children expressed conflicting feelings about changes within their friendships; they were excited to move on and form new connections but at the same time felt sad at leaving people behind:

*Ivy: I'll make some new friends. But I still leave behind my old ones.*

Having conflicting feelings and emotions was expressed by the children throughout, about different topics associated with their lifestyle, and is reflected in many of the themes and subthemes as well as a subtheme on its own (later in this theme).

Some of the children talked about maintaining connections with their friends (see Theme 3) and although this was comforting, for some, seeing their friends again was also tinged with sadness:

*Ivy: When I get back to play with my old friends, I remember how fun it is and then I just want to stay with them.*

One of the main issues regarding friendship was that whilst the pupils I spoke to experienced considerable mobility themselves, their military friends also moved a great deal, so the children talked about not only leaving their friends behind, but also of being left by others. This was particularly difficult for Thomas:

*Thomas: The main difficulty is having forces friends. And, because usually, like, as soon as I like make a load of friends, either most of them move, like straight, pretty much like a few months after. Or I move a few months later.*

Many of the children appeared to live in a constant state of flux with their friendships. Sometimes, the children received very little notice of impending changes:

*Molly (talking about another military friend): He was my friend in Wales but then he moved from Wales they went like, he went from Wales but I didn't know where he was going because people were going to B [a different town], people were going everywhere.*

The children talked about the *process* of making new friendships when they moved schools. Almost all of them perceived making friends to be an active process that requires effort:

*Charlotte: I think like, going to different schools, you can't just be, be shy and just don't try and make friends. You've got to kind of like, because it's always going to be hard to go to a new school. it's not like you're just going to, it's all going to happen for you, so yeah. I think you've just got to go and like put yourself in there and stuff.*

*Researcher: So it sounds like you've got to try quite hard?*

*Charlotte: Yeah.*

Some of the children found this 'skill' much more difficult to master than others. In general, this was more true of the boys than the girls, as Thomas's description of himself illustrates:

*Thomas: I, I'm not that much of a social expert so it's really difficult making new friends.*

*Subtheme 1b: 'Dad goes away a lot': impact of parental absence on family relationships and dynamics*

This theme captures the children's statements about their fathers' absences during deployment or duties and the impact this had on the family. For all of the children, their fathers were actively serving military parents whilst their mothers were based at home.

Although all of the participants had experienced their fathers' deployments, there was a range of experiences in terms of deployment frequencies and lengths of time:

*Belle: He goes away quite a lot. I think it was when I was 6 months he moved, he went to like Iraq for 6 months.*

*Thomas: He's been away about, maybe 19 times.*

*Luke: Now because he's been promoted and moving here, he's not going to be going away as much.*

All except one of the children reported finding it difficult when their fathers go away for work and miss them whilst they are gone. Even Charlotte, who generally presented as a very resilient and reserved girl, talked about finding it difficult without her Dad at home:

*Charlotte: When he first went away to Afghanistan, that's probably the longest he'd been away, I felt, that wasn't like, I felt a bit weird like, he should be here but he wasn't.*

Most of the children talked about missing their fathers:

*Molly: When my dad goes away I miss him.*

And:

*Researcher: About when dad goes away, what that's like?*

*Kai: I feel lonely.*

For Ellie, the feelings of sadness are so great that she finds it difficult to even talk about her father when he is away. Ellie told me that when her friends are talking about their fathers in school she struggles to join in their conversations as she finds it too emotional:

*Ellie: I want to talk too but I can't really talk about my dad without my dad actually being there.*

Many of the children talked about how their homes feel different when their fathers are away and the impact this has on them emotionally:

*Belle: It felt really weird because I was always used to him being at home.*

The children also noted some practical issues that arise during deployments. Many of the children take on additional responsibilities or experience a shift in family dynamics when their

fathers are not there:

Belle: *My mum sometimes asks me to, like if my Dad's away, like, for 6 months, she sometimes asks me to help look after T [younger brother] um, because obviously she's still got work to do so she would have to take us to childminders or leave us with her friends so I think she would find that quite difficult to leave us there.*

Researcher: *So sometimes you're asked to do a bit more?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Sometimes additional responsibilities consist of childcare, and sometimes other tasks such as cleaning or tidying:

Thomas: *Me and my sister have to help round the house a little bit more than usual. Just because it's only my mum.*

Researcher: *What's that like?*

Thomas: *It's boring to be fair. It's just boring.*

Sometimes, parental absences lead to different rules or norms at home:

Ivy: *When my dad went away once there's this little cupboard on top of my wardrobe there was. And I used to, and I climbed in it when he wasn't there because my mum would let me do it but my dad wouldn't. So then I slept in there.*

Ivy: *When dad's not there we can we can eat like stuff that he doesn't like.*

Above, Ivy described positive examples of being allowed to do things when her father is deployed that she is not usually permitted to do, but she was the minority. Mostly, changes at home in response to deployment were reported negatively by the children:

Luke: *I was sad because um, I got used to him taking me to school and things like that, but when he goes away it just has to be Mum taking me and P [younger sister] and it's a bit hard for Mum as well.*

In general, the children expressed a desire to spend more time with their fathers. Along with the impact on friendships, dealing with their fathers' absences was one of the most difficult aspects of the army lifestyle as identified by the children:

Kai: *I wish he could just stay, and I wish he could come home quicker so then we could have more time together.*

#### *Subtheme 1c: 'I wish I could stay here' – desire for greater stability*

The children talked a lot about mobility and the impact that moving schools and houses has on them. There was a high level of mobility in the sample. Consequently, experiences involving change and transitions are common for the children:

Molly: *I just have to move and learn and then move again and then learn and then move and learn and move then learn and move.*

And:

Researcher: *So you've done quite a lot of moving haven't you?*

Thomas: *Yeah. I've had my fair share.*

Generally, the children reported finding moving houses and schools difficult. For some, mobility was the most difficult aspect of being a MCC:

Charlotte: *I think the main bad thing is moving around the whole time.*

The difficulties seemed to centre around notions of feeling 'settled', with many children reporting that they either did not feel settled as a result of their lifestyle, or that it took them a while to settle, but once they had, it was often time to move on again:

Luke: *So when you've sort of settled, after going away, you have to go away again. And as soon as you settle there you have to go away again and then you just, you don't settle.*

The children expressed ways in which they would like to increase their feelings of stability, for example by not moving again, forging new friendships, or looking forward to a change of lifestyle when their fathers leave the military.

Charlotte attends boarding school and for her, the consistency of her schooling is incredibly important to her feelings of stability:

Charlotte: *Because of my boarding school I don't really spend, I probably spend more time at school than here, apart from the weekends when I come back, so yeah and I, I like, because I'm at the school now if my parents move away I'll always stay, I kind of, I can just stay at that school until I go to senior school.*

Researcher: *Is that important to you?*

Charlotte: *Yeah.*

#### *Subtheme 1d: Yearn for familiarity and a sense of loss*

Linked to the previous subtheme, yet distinct from it, this subtheme presents the children's voices when talking about some of the *implications* of a lack of stability. This theme represents the children's reflections on their lives prior to changes, rather than talking specifically about how they seek stability. Some children became sad or nostalgic when talking about their previous lives elsewhere. Molly in particular, expressed a real sense of loss when she moved from Germany to the UK:

Molly: *I miss my school [starts crying] and I miss my friends.*

Molly: *And sometimes I watch like some TV programmes like from CBBC that like they go everywhere and sometimes they go to Germany and so I go up to my bedroom and have a cry.*

Although Molly was the most extreme example, many of the other children expressed sadness or loss when reflecting on their previous schools or homes.

Many of the children talked about wanting to be around familiar people or places. One of the unique features of a MCC's lifestyle is that, due to high levels of mobility but limited numbers of military bases, many MCC move back or near to somewhere they have already been, or may be reunited with other MCC they have met before. Many of the children referred to this during their interviews:

Molly: *If we've already been there and if we're going back to the same house if we're going to a different house but if we are also going to the same school then I know what they're like and stuff but if we're going back to Germany again I'll be really happy.*

Charlotte: *I felt sad that we were leaving, but if we were going to move I kind of wanted to come here. Because I knew this place as well.*

Thomas: *It felt good being back in my home country and we weren't actually too far away from places I've lived before.*

Belle: *Sometimes if your friends are also in the army, your friend's parents are also in the army you might see them again one day because if they keep moving then you might see them someday.*

Sometimes the children were reacquainted with familiar people in their new schools and this was a comfort to them, as explained by Belle:

Belle: *When I started the school I felt, it felt a bit strange um, because I didn't know anybody from there but I did meet one of my friends from B [previous town] there.*

Researcher: *Oh how strange! Why was one of your friends from B there?*

Belle: *Um her dad was army as well.*

Researcher: *Who moved first?*

Belle: *So I think she moved first, um halfway in Reception and then she must have gone to S [current town] and then I met her back there in year one.*

Researcher: *How weird, did you remember her?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *What was that like? Seeing her again?*

Belle: *It was quite nice because at least I knew somebody from there.*



### *Subtheme 1e: Uncertainty about the future*

This subtheme captures the children's thoughts about the future and how they live with a high level of uncertainty around their next steps. All of the children referred to their current living and/or schooling arrangements as transient. Change for all of the children was inevitable, and they varied in their responses to this. Some were pragmatic and accepting:

Charlotte: *Well I'm used to it now.*

And:

Researcher: *Okay, and what do you think about all of this?*

Thomas: *I just, I just think it's just a part of life.*

Whereas some found it more difficult to accept:

Kai: *My dad got promoted so now he works in a different army camp and he's going to be moving to another place, a lot for work. And I wish I could just stay here.*

The children were asked whether they would want to work in the military when they grow up. The children were almost unanimous in saying no, and often, uncertainty was the reason. Most of the participants saw a military career as unpredictable.

Most of the children raised the fact that their fathers would one day be leaving military employment, and for some, this was a time to look forward to as it may bring about less uncertainty and greater stability:

Researcher: *How do you all feel about him leaving?*

Belle: *Oh I feel quite happy because that means he's not going to be going away as much and he'll be able to stay at home.*

Similarly, Ivy talked about the fact that her father is considering leaving the army soon. She was positive about such a change:

Researcher: *What do you think about the idea of dad quitting the army?*

Ivy: *Um, I think that means that I will, that I will just get new friends and then I can stay with them for the whole, unless they move away, for the whole time um time that I'm in school.*

### *Subtheme 1f: Impact on learning and the curriculum*

The children were asked whether they thought that growing up as a MCC had positively or negatively affected their learning. Most of the children answered 'no' to this. However, *all* of the children talked about either missing or repeating learning experiences as a consequence of moving schools. For Belle, this had an emotional impact:

Belle: *Well when I was in S [previous town] when we had to start learning about like different kinds of flowers and plants I didn't really understand it because I hadn't done it before and obviously the other people had in Reception or they done like some of it in Reception so when I'd got there I didn't really understand what we were supposed to do.*

Researcher: *And what was that like?*

Belle: *I felt quite like, I don't know, I just felt quite left out because I didn't know what to do or what was going on.*

Similarly, Thomas expressed how his gaps in learning made him feel annoyed:

Thomas: *When I moved in, like, I was expected to know, and, well of course I didn't.*

Researcher: *And what was that like?*

Thomas: *Horrible, yeah.*

Researcher: *How did it make you feel?*

Thomas: *Just really, really, really annoyed.*

Most of the children had a clear message for schools on this topic, perhaps most eloquently expressed by Charlotte:

Researcher: *Is there anything that you think teachers should know about teaching children from military backgrounds?*

Charlotte: *Um, well I think, when someone does come new from any school, not just for military, they should probably, probably like, especially if they come in the middle of the year, they should ask them what they've done, what topics they've done, because some people, they find it really hard, like, catching up on different topics.*

Researcher: *Has that happened to you? Have you been asked what you've done?*

Charlotte: *No I've never been asked. I've never found it very hard but I know some people do. Because I've missed quite a lot of topics and I've also repeated quite a lot of topics.*

Repeating and omitting learning opportunities was a common experience for all of the children.

### *Subtheme 1g: Emotional implications and responses to lifestyle*

This subtheme draws together the children's statements regarding their emotional responses to their lifestyle and encapsulates their worries and fears as well as how they respond to their feelings.

The children talked about having various worries associated with their lifestyle. Many of their worries concerned their fathers. Belle explained how, in the past, she had worries about forgetting her father when we went away. Interestingly, she was more concerned with the impact this would have on him than herself:

*Belle: I was only young then so I wouldn't really remember him much and he wanted me to remember him.*

Other worries centred around fathers' safety. Many of the children viewed the military as a dangerous career, associated with fighting or war:

*Kai: I think it's a dangerous job.*

Perceptions of their fathers' role led to worries about safety:

*Thomas: There's the chance that he has to go to war, and, there is, and, there's also somebody accidentally shooting him.*

*Charlotte: When you're like that age when you go to war you think you're just going to die. So I just kind of thought that.*

*Kai: He might be killed.*

In addition to fears about safety, some of the children disclosed worries they have over the negative impact a military career has generally for their fathers:

*Belle: It might have been quite upsetting for my dad because he wouldn't see me for six months so he wouldn't see me until I was almost one.*

*Belle: I think um, he feels quite upset because he like has to work long hours and goes away.*

*Luke: He, yeah, very annoying because, and he wanted to see us as well.*

And for their mothers:

*Belle: I think my mum kind of misses my Dad when he's at work because obviously then she has to look after both of us and it might be quite a struggle for her sometimes.*

And:

*Luke: When he goes away it just has to be Mum taking me and P [sister] and it's a bit hard for Mum as well.*

*Researcher: Yeah. What was it like for your Mum do you think?*

*Luke: Um very hard because she had to look after me and P all the time, for like, 3 or 4 months straight. So then when Dad comes home, she gets a bit, it's a bit unusual for her because Dad's helping and then when he goes away, she has to do it by herself.*

Thomas' father has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and for Thomas, there was a direct

link between his father's military experiences and the onset of his illness:

Researcher: *And do you know where the PTSD came from?*

Thomas: *Yeah, it came from Iraq in maybe um, 2005.*

Researcher: *What happened do you know?*

Thomas: *I don't know. All I know is he saw some horrible stuff.*

And:

Thomas: *This can't be cured. It can only be, like the pain of it can only be lessened.*

In addition to worries, the children had other emotional responses to their lifestyle, including feeling a lack of understanding from their civilian counterparts:

Molly: *They're just like normal people that their dads and stuff so they don't understand or anything. Their dads aren't in the army and they don't understand what it actually feels, because their dad doesn't go away and leave them, and so they don't know how it feels to miss their dad.*

Luke: *At W [previous school] there was barely any people who had dads or mums going away, which was a bit tough because they got to have their parents all the time but we didn't.*

The children reported a variety of methods or strategies they have for coping with their negative feelings. Some of these were productive and positive (see Theme 3) but some may cause concern, including isolating themselves:

Ellie: *If people, and my dad's away at the moment, if my dad is away at that time and people are talking about my dad and stuff, uh their dads, I sometimes want to just go and sit somewhere nice by myself and read a book or something while their talking about their dads and their jobs and stuff.*

Inhibiting their responses or concealing their feelings from others was also apparent:

Charlotte: *When you cry it doesn't really make anything better.*

Charlotte: *We like to keep this stuff private.*

And:

Researcher: *Have you got somebody you can talk to when you're feeling sad?*

Molly: *No I just like to keep it to myself.*

Hiding or concealing negative emotions was sometimes due to fear of other people's reactions:

Thomas: *It is something I try and avoid thinking about...I think it is just my, my, my um, my brain trying to stop me from embarrassing myself.*

Molly: *I told my BFF [best friend forever] in Wales and she started laughing at me.*

Molly represented the most worrying and extreme example of this. She was extremely emotional during the interview and frequently said how she had not confided her feelings on this topic before:

Molly: *I don't really like to talk to anyone. I just like to pretend I'm nice and happy.*

Researcher: *Why is that?*

Molly: *Because I'm always happy [crying] and it's been a long time since we were in Germany and they forget it and they forget it and then they don't know how important it is to me.*

#### *Subtheme 1h: Having mixed feelings*

The last subtheme in Theme 1 is connected to the previous one and contains the children's dialogue about experiencing *conflicting feelings* about their lifestyle. This was threaded through the children's responses on a number of topics, including moving homes, making new friends and starting new schools. Many of the children had mixed feelings and Molly explained the impact this conflict had on her:

Researcher: *And what's that like? Feeling a lot of different things?*

Molly: *Weird. Like in that part like in the sad part it feels like I just don't want to tell anyone and it's just like my thing and it's like if I'm crying doesn't that mean like, I've done something or someone else has done something so I don't like I feel sad but if I'm also caught crying because I did something I'll be disappointed and if I'm like, on the happy side I'm going to be like cheerful I'm going to be happy I'm going to be all those things.*

Charlotte also talked about feeling happy and sad at the same time:

Charlotte: *I think the main bad thing is moving around the whole time. But well another good thing is that you get to like, get the opportunities you get in different countries. You wouldn't do that normally if you didn't.*

The children also had mixed feelings about the military as a career, and Charlotte talked about the pros and cons of having siblings as they can be a comfort when moving but also inhibit making new friends. Living with a melting pot of feelings, some of them conflicting, was a common experience for most of the children.

## Theme 2: 'Not letting me down in life': The benefits and opportunities of growing up in a military family

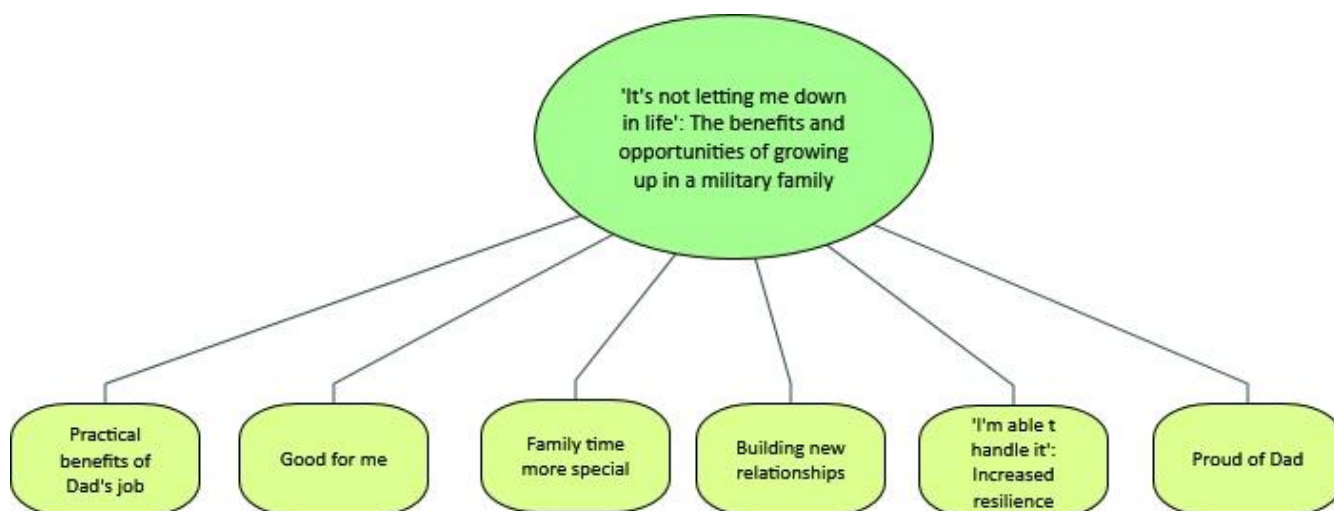


Figure 5: Thematic map for theme 2

When asked open questions about their lifestyle, most of the children presented a somewhat negative view, electing to discuss difficulties and challenges over benefits and opportunities. However, some of the children talked about positives associated with their lifestyle, and I have drawn together the children's responses about the opportunities that their lifestyles can bring. The title for this theme 'It's not letting me down in life' came from Charlotte, who presented the most positive views about growing up as a MCC:

*Charlotte: Well I think, living in the army, it doesn't make a big, like it's not a big stop in your life. It's kind of quite fun. Yeah. It's not like it's letting me down in life so. Yeah.*

### Subtheme 2a: Practical benefits of Dad's job

When asked about the positives associated with military life, most of the children talked about practical benefits, for example, earnings:

*Belle: He gets paid quite a lot.*

*Kai: He gets paid a lot of money.*

*Ellie: He gets paid a lot of money.*

*Thomas: He makes a lot of money out of it.*

Six out of the eight children cited their fathers' earnings as the main benefit of his service career. For some children, this was the only positive they could think of:

*Thomas: The money, the money is the only good thing.*

However, other children talked about additional practical benefits, such as free flights or having an army house. Luke talked about the allowances that schools make for holidays:

Luke: *Because we're in the military um, sometimes schools let us go off for a couple of days because um, he doesn't come back for the whole half term or term. And in February, after, for a bit of the start of half term, um, we got to, we go to go to Paris.*

#### *Subtheme 2b: Proud of Dad*

Another advantage identified by a few of the children were their feelings about their Dad doing the job he does. Some children showed pride in their fathers. For some children, their father's job made them feel safe:

Ellie: *He knows how to defend us if we're in an attack.*

And:

Kai: *He has a gun at work so then if anyone tried to break in he could communicate to the army to tell them or he could run to the army and get his gun.*

Researcher: *And how does it make you feel that Dad has a gun?*

Kai: *That, that we're protected.*

#### *Subtheme 2c: Family time more special*

With family time being limited, some of the children talked about their time together being more precious. Although this arose from a disadvantage (missing their fathers), I have included this subtheme as the children were able to identify that the 'silver lining' of their lifestyles was that their time together was more special:

Luke: *Yeah the good things are because he gets paid lots so we get to do more and things with the family when he's back.*

Charlotte: *It kind of makes it, when he is here, like more, more special in some ways.*

Reunions with their serving parents were talked about fondly and many of the children described their memories of these important times. Belle had a particularly lovely memory of when her father surprised them by his homecoming on her brother's birthday:

Belle: *She [Belle's Mother] said that she had to go out and get something and she left me with my aunt and uncle and T [Belle's brother] and when she came back I was in the living room and my dad just came in.*

Researcher: *And what happened?*

Belle: *I, I just ran up to him, I gave him big hugs.*

### *Subtheme 2d: Building new relationships*

Although the children described moving homes and schools as generally quite difficult, they also recognised the opportunities that mobility can bring, particularly in terms of forming new relationships:

*Belle: When I came here I didn't know anybody but I thought that might be a good thing because then I can introduce myself to lots of other people.*

*Charlotte: Sometimes it's quite nice to go somewhere new.*

*Molly: The good things are that I meet new people when I move and, and um new teachers, different schools and how they do stuff and more learning.*

*Ivy: I get to meet loads of new people when we move and I get to make new friends.*

Interestingly, more girls than boys described making new social connections as positive.

### *Subtheme 2e: 'Good for me'*

This subtheme draws together the children's responses about how their lifestyle has brought about positive strengths or personal qualities. Luke and Thomas talked about having to be more grown up with their fathers being away. Although the boys didn't necessarily identify this as a positive thing, their fathers' absences meant that they became more independent in their school work and looking after themselves.

More obvious to the children were the social benefits that come from the mobility of their lifestyle. Many children talked about having a greater ability to socialise and make friends:

*Belle: I make friends quite quickly because when I came here from S [previous school] they gave me like a buddy and I instantly became friends with her so I found it quite easy.*

And:

*Researcher: So how easy or difficult do you find it to make friends?*

*Charlotte: Quite, well quite, I wouldn't say I find it easy but it's not like, I'm not crying every night, so yeah, I find it just like how most people do it, because I did it from like so early on, moving around schools, I think I was just so young then, I just kind of got the hang of it a bit.*

*Researcher: So do you think the moving around has actually helped you to make friends?*

*Charlotte: Yeah.*

And:



Ellie: *It's just helped me get more better at making new friends and stuff and knowing how to talk to them about saying 'Hi can I be your friend?' and stuff without like some people might have they've just moved here let's say from across the street and stuff. They may have only moved once and they might not know how to like handle it and stuff and how to talk to them. But I know quite a lot because I've moved a lot.*

Ivy expressed a particularly apt perception of herself:

Ivy: *My brother says I am a social butterfly which means I can just make friends with everyone.*

Researcher: *What do you think has made you a social butterfly?*

Ivy: *I think it is that I've, I think it's that I've met lots of people and I made friends with them I like so now I like to make friends with everyone that I meet.*

Interestingly, Ivy was able to reflect on the long-term benefit of being a 'social butterfly':

Researcher: *How do you think being a social butterfly will affect you as you get older?*

Ivy: *I think it will mean that I like, work well with other people.*

Although it should be noted that not everyone felt this way and some of the children (particularly the boys) found making friends very anxiety-provoking (see Subtheme 1a).

Another benefit in terms of personal qualities was the added empathy that living with challenges can bring:

Ellie: *But my friend's dad couldn't come and I kind of knew how she felt.*

Charlotte: *She [a friend at school] will get homesick sometimes, but because I lived in K [another country] I know how it feels so we can kind of help each other.*

#### *Subtheme 2f: 'I'm able to handle it': increased resilience*

Although the children did not explicitly use the term 'resilience', and I am not sure that they could identify this quality within themselves, I have included it as a separate subtheme as it featured very strongly in the children's interviews. The title quote of this subtheme comes from Thomas, whose tenacity was threaded throughout his interview:

Thomas: *I do feel kind of sad but I'm able to handle it.*

Other children also expressed resilience by comparing themselves with other MCC to show that their situation was not as difficult as others':

Luke: *But one of my friends has moved to 7 [houses] in year 5 already, so [referring to his own situation] a bit hard but fine really.*

Interestingly, many of the children talked about their resilience growing as they got older.

Most reported the first transitions between homes and schools as the hardest, and over time they have become more resilient to the challenges involved:

Belle: *I sort of just started to get used to that when people go away.*

Researcher: *You said you get used to it, so do you think that the more often your dad goes the more you get used to it?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *So you get kind of better at it?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Other children agreed that they have become more resilient over time:

Charlotte: *It doesn't really affect me as it used to. Sometimes, I mean I feel sad when he goes but it doesn't really affect me that much.*

Ivy: *Um, I don't think it's like too bad anymore because I have already moved like three schools so it won't be that bad.*

Ellie: *When I was little I used to always cry.*

### Theme 3: What helps: Promoting coping strategies and building resilience

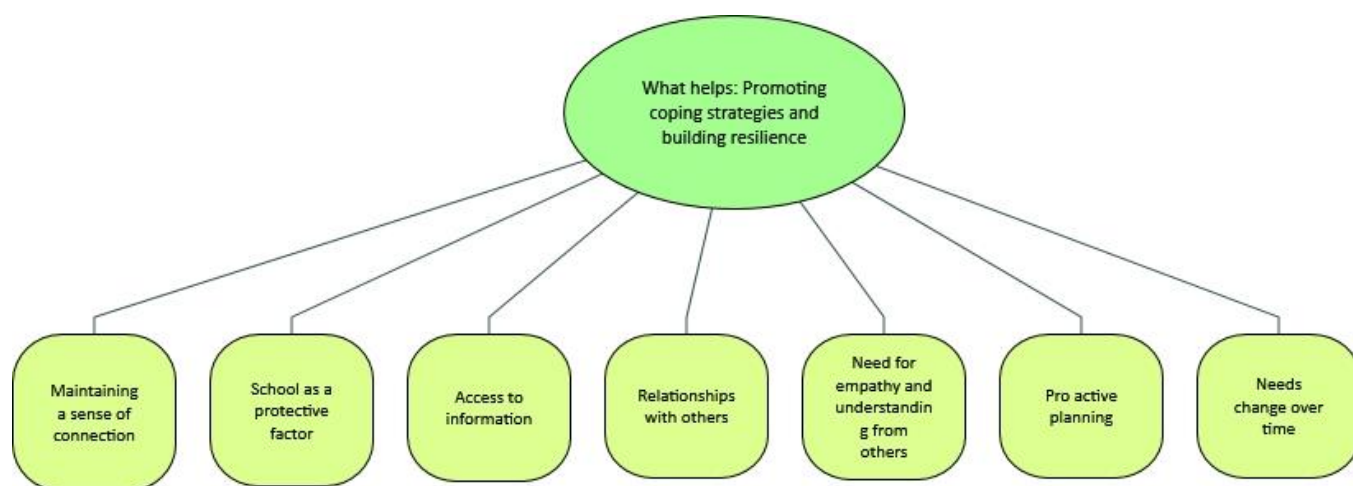


Figure 6: Thematic map for Theme 3

This final theme encapsulates the strategies that I and the participants identified as helpful to them for coping with the challenges of their lifestyles. A recurring concept here is the importance of relationships; either building new connections or maintaining existing ones. The children also identified specific coping mechanisms that they utilise during times of change or parental absence. These strategies contain a range of practical and emotional supports that can be offered at home or by schools. This section also highlights that the children's needs evolve and change over time.

### *Subtheme 3a: Relationships with others*

Despite some children choosing to keep difficult or negative feelings to themselves (see Subtheme 1g), they all recognised that they sometimes need help from others, and that their relationships with other people are important:

Researcher: *What's helped you? What's been helpful?*

Thomas: *I think it's just been people around me trying to help and support me. Yeah.*

The most important sources of support to the participants are the remaining parents. For all of the children in the present study, this was their mother:

Belle: *When I'm upset, at home I just give my mum hugs.*

Ivy: *It is all right, it is not that bad. Because then when he moves away we have we at least have our mum still. We can like play games with her and stuff.*

Luke: *I just told my mum and then she sorted it out.*

Thomas: *I do feel kind of sad but I'm able to handle it. Just because my mum is in the house as well.*

And:

Researcher: *What helps you?*

Charlotte: *Um, like talking to my mum.*

Charlotte: *When he goes away, um, I'm quite used to it now so my mum's always there.*

Other relationships were also identified as important to the children. For example, Charlotte talked about her siblings playing an important role as they have been subject to similar experiences.

Friends were also crucial and some children talked about making friends as a conscious coping and settling strategy when they arrive somewhere new:

Researcher: *Is there anything that's helped you settle in do you think?*

Ivy: *Um, I have made a new friend called Millie and she lives like right down the road from me. So we can like play together, like outside. And once it was, the day it was snowing we played out together and we built like a little igloo, but we destroyed the top because the top kept falling down. So it was just like a little wall round.*

Researcher: *So the thing that's helped you to settle in most has been to make some friends?*

Ivy: *Yeah.*

Belle had a deliberate strategy of making as many friends as possible, as quickly as possible, as a way of facilitating happiness:

Belle: *I was quite upset but when school started, and the day after I'd met people and made friends I started to feel less upset and I started to feel happy.*

Belle: *My friends just sort of like helped me.*

The children had various preferences when choosing friends. Feeling similar to friends, and sharing experiences was important to some, such as Luke, who had previously attended a school where he was one of very few military children, and prefers his current school where there are more military children on roll:

Researcher: *And how is it better for you at C [current school]? So I know there's more [military] children, but how is that a better thing? How is that important?*

Luke: *Because I know more people are going through the same things as me, because their parents are going away as well, and if it was just me I'd feel a bit left out but now more people are doing it.*

And:

Luke: *It's given me a boost not being the only person who is in the military.*

Likewise, Belle reported finding it easier to be around other MCC as she finds them more empathetic:

Belle: *I prefer where there's lots of kids in the army because that means then like they've been moving quite a lot so they would know like how it feels like when you move.*

Researcher: *Yeah, is that something that helps you do you think?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *How does it help you?*

Belle: *'Cause like it helps you to make more friends.*

However, interestingly, other children felt the opposite way, and talked about either actively or subconsciously surrounding themselves with *civilian* children as these friendships are more likely to be stable and consistent:

Researcher: *Do you know which of your friends are service kids and which ones aren't?*

Thomas: *None of them are. Yeah. Which is a good thing, which is a really good thing.*

And:

Researcher: *Out of all of your schools which one has been your favourite?*

Thomas: *Probably this one, to be fair.*

Researcher: *Why's that?*

Thomas: *Mainly because every, all of my friends aren't forces children so they won't be moving.*

Belle and Ellie also talked about gravitating towards civilian children:

Belle: *My best friends aren't from the army, so I think that's quite good.*

And:

Researcher: *And how does it make you feel to only have a few people whose dads are in the army?*

Ellie: *It's it is much better than having lots of people.*

### *Subtheme 3b: Need for empathy/understanding from others*

Connected, yet distinct from the above subtheme, are the children's responses regarding their needs from other people. Although mothers were of crucial importance to the children, some felt unable to discuss their difficult feelings, or talked about a lack of empathy from others:

Researcher: *Why do you like to keep it to yourself?*

Molly: *Because sometimes, when I get sad, I just [inaudible]. People don't get sad over this stuff and they might laugh.*

Researcher: *I don't think anybody would laugh.*

Molly: *Yeah, but one time I told someone and they laughed.*

Feeling understood and empathy from others was talked about as important to some of the children.

### *Subtheme 3c: Maintaining a sense of connection with lost or absent ones*

Many of the children talked about finding ways to maintain a sense of connection with friends after they had moved away, or with their fathers when they were deployed. For the children who had contact with friends or fathers, they found this comforting:

Charlotte: *I was never properly scared like because he used to phone like every night and just so, yeah.*

Belle talked about contact with old friends as exciting:

Belle: *I find it really exciting because I get to see them again.*

However, there can be a flipside to meeting up with old friends as it can reinforce feelings of sadness or loss.

Ellie talked emotively about staying in touch with her father whilst he was working away. They keep in touch by telephone. For Ellie, this form of contact is not enough and she appeared to resent as well as appreciate the use of technology to maintain contact:

Ellie: *There's always a bing where it says 'I love you too' and you just wanna see him a lot and you just don't wanna see a picture of him you want to see his face and see, and give him a big cuddle without just like an emoji or something of cuddling and stuff.*

Ellie: *I feel really happier when he's back because I can see him again and without um a picture or just a text I can see him and say it say it to my face that he loves me.*

The children adopted other strategies to maintain a sense of connection with their fathers and friends. The use of objects was described by the participants as an important and powerful way of feeling connected. For example, Molly's friend gave her a gift when they parted, which she now treasures and uses to comfort herself when upset:

Molly: *And then he had to move and it was really sad and he gave me this little seahorse thing because he knew I had a memory box and he gave me a little seahorse thing.*

Researcher: *Have you still got it?*

Molly: *Yeah. It's in my memory box and when I feel sad I just open that and think of him.*

Similarly, Belle treasures a gift her father gave her prior to a deployment:

Belle: *I remember that I found it very upsetting that he was going and I kept crying a lot, so he gave me this teddy from Build-A-Bear and he recorded his voice in it.*

Researcher: *Oh that's such a good idea what was that like?*

Belle: *I really liked it because then if I pressed that I will be able to remember his voice.*

Researcher: *Have you still got it?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *Do you remember what it says?*

Belle: *It says 'I love you too much in all the world'.*

Ellie takes objects from her father's room to evoke his presence when he goes away:

Researcher: *When he goes away what do you think might help you to feel better about it?*

Ellie: *Um, I have one of his T-shirts and I cuddle it at night. And I have a picture of him too.*

Researcher: *Is there anything else that helps you when he's away?*

Ellie: *Sometimes, I once did this when he went away recently, I sprayed his cologne in my room so it smelt like he was there.*

In addition to receiving objects, the children also talked about *giving* them. Ellie talked about sneaking objects and notes into her father's suitcase before he goes away, for him to find

when he arrives:

Ellie: *I always give him like a teddy or my little unicorn thing to keep with him with a note in it that I secretly put in his suitcase.*

Researcher: *And so he takes it with him?*

Ellie: *Yeah.*

Researcher: *That's a lovely idea. Who came up with that idea?*

Ellie: *Me.*

Researcher: *Have you spoken to Daddy about what that's like for him?*

Ellie: *He told me that it is lovely how, how, how I give him some things to watch over him. And a note. I just thought of it when I was looking at a teddy and my dad was gonna go away like tomorrow so I just put it in there with a little note to say that I love you and I miss you.*

For the children who used and talked about objects as a way of maintaining connection, they had a powerful protective effect on them.

### *Subtheme 3d: Access to information*

Accessing information about their father's whereabouts was described as important to participants. For Charlotte, a lack of information generated fearful feelings:

Charlotte: *Sometimes I felt a bit scared, I didn't really know what he was doing out there because I didn't see, I probably didn't just didn't understand it.*

Ellie wanted reassurance about her Dad's movements to alleviate her anxiety:

Ellie: *Make sure I can always like talk to him on my phone and talk, like message him. So I know how he's doing.*

She found it comforting to be able to picture her father's living circumstances in her mind:

Ellie: *He always like gives me a tour of his room when he is away. So I know where he is.*

However, the *timing* of information is also important. Charlotte talked about not wanting information too far in advance of her father's deployments as it can give her more time to worry:

Charlotte: *So sometimes it's good like to know, to not know so far before. But you don't want to know like the day before he goes, like maybe like, so you'd normally know about 2 months before maybe, like a month before or something like that.*

Researcher: *So would you like, like that time to be shorter?*

Charlotte: *Yeah.*

### *Subtheme 3d: Proactive planning*

Some of the children talked about actively making plans to help them cope with upcoming changes. For example, Ivy consciously spent as much time as possible with her friend before they were separated:

*Ivy: We spent as much time as we could together because she was moving.*

And Ellie talked about making similar preparations for her father going, by mindfully spending time together before he left.

### *Subtheme 3e: School as a protective factor*

Some of the children talked about feeling most resilient when in school, rather than at home:

*Thomas: I only really worry about that stuff when I'm at home.*

*Belle: I feel just fine in school when I'm doing my work.*

This suggests that the school environment is a protective factor for them. It was difficult to ascertain why this should be so. For Luke, it was simply about being around other MCC. Whereas Charlotte was comforted by the fact that in school, adults were emotionally available:

*Charlotte: We've always got staff, we've always got someone to talk to or something to do, to do that. Our school's quite good on that stuff.*

Although, it should be noted that Charlotte expressed a minority view here, and it may also be significant that she was the only participant to attend an independent, fee-paying school. Other children felt that they would like more emotional support at school:

*Ivy: There could be someone like, they could have someone like, with them that they know and they could like having talked to them and see that if everything is okay and that they could like calm them down a little bit.*

*Researcher: Do you think that would be helpful?*

*Ivy: Yeah.*

*Researcher: Would you ever have wanted anything like that?*

*Ivy: Um yeah.*

Others also voiced wanting more individual emotional support:

*Luke: I think they should have talked to you a bit more, but not the whole school or class.*

And:



Researcher: *When you were talking to me early one about your worries about dad would it be useful to have somebody in school to talk to about that?*

Thomas: *Maybe. That might be a bit useful yeah.*

Many of the children expressed a desire to have someone in school to talk to, or even just to know that someone would be available if they needed them; such as the 'independent listener' scheme in place at Charlotte's independent school:

Charlotte: *Because even though not that many people go and talk to them, because we don't feel like we need to, they're always there, they always come and say hello to us, and then if we do need something, we've always got someone there. Instead of like, going to talk to a teacher the whole time.*

Researcher: *So it's important to know that they're there, even if you don't need to use them?*

Charlotte: *Yeah.*

Other important factors at school that the children talked about were having family involvement with the school:

Researcher: *Is there anything that anybody at school has done to make you feel welcome here or help you settle in? Adults or children?*

Ivy: *Well my mum works here now...It's um nice because I can tell what I've done in the morning and in the afternoon I can tell her what I've done, like in the afternoon, like when we go home from school.*

And having supportive teachers:

Belle: *I told the teacher that I didn't understand what we were supposed to be doing and she just helped me and like described everything that we've already learnt.*

Researcher: *And did that help?*

Belle: *Yeah.*

### *Subtheme 3f: Needs change over time*

Lastly, this subtheme describes how children talked directly or indirectly about their needs for support changing over time. The children were asked about their experiences at different stages of the deployment cycle, and responses were mixed. Three of the children reporting finding the period *before* their fathers go away as the hardest:

Belle: *I remember that I found it very upsetting that he was going and I kept crying a lot.*

Charlotte: *I think I find before the most difficult...Because, because, like when my dad went to Afghanistan, it was quite a big thing. We knew about it quite a long time before, so we'd been like thinking about it quite a lot. And I think that was most of the reason but then once he was out there, it didn't really, like it just felt normal after a while.*

Luke: *The hardest was definitely before.*

These children found the anticipation of their fathers going incredibly difficult, and many of them managed to find ways to adjust once he had gone.

However, two participants reported finding the period *whilst* their fathers are away as the most challenging:

Ellie: *Sometimes, when he's about to get ready to go and stuff sometimes I I watch through the door, watching him pack and sometimes it makes me a bit upset that he's going. But most of the time I feel okay. Because he's not gone yet.*

For these children, missing their fathers was a barrier to adjusting. Also for these children, the length of time their fathers are away is significant; their ability to cope with his absence diminishes over time:

Thomas: *Well really it depends how long he's gone. If he's gone for like a week or under, I'm fine with it. But if he's gone for like month for more then no, no. So really it depends how long he's gone.*

Another significant finding regarding the changes of needs over time came from Molly, who talked about having a long time in between moves as difficult:

Molly: *Like so when I was in Germany I was there for like 6 years and I moved there when I was one and finished there when I was 6 so I was really upset because of that.*

For her, having too long in between moves was hard as she felt settled in a new place and then had to move on.

#### 4.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the children's interview responses under three key themes that emerged from the analysis. In summary, the children were more able to identify challenges associated with their lifestyle than benefits. Participants talked about difficulties associated with interruptions or discontinuations of important friendships, as well as expressing a desire for greater stability and negative emotions or feelings. Sometimes they have no outlet for these feelings. All of the children were able to identify that there are benefits to their MCC status, but mostly these are perceived as practical (e.g. financial). The children talked about a range of different support mechanisms, including emotional and practical support with their

feelings and with their learning. Relationships are key throughout, and the children expressed a range of feelings that sometimes conflict.

The next chapter will draw together my reflections on the findings and evaluate their contribution to the existing knowledge on this topic, by situating key findings in the context of previous theory and research as well as identifying future recommendations for research and practice.

## 5. Discussion

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### 5.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter will present and discuss key findings of the present research in order to evaluate their contribution to UK literature around MCC in families and schools. To do this, I shall return to the four key psychological theories identified as relevant to MCC and introduced in Chapter 2; belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory.

Each theory will be presented in turn; I shall briefly remind the reader of the key features of each theory and any previous application of it to MCC, before discussing how the present findings support, diverge from and contribute to the literature base around MCC and advance our understanding of this group and their needs. I will also suggest how each theory can be relevant to parents and professionals when providing support. Practical recommendations are summarised in Table 2 which can be found later in the chapter.

It is important to note that the findings presented here arose from a small-scale study that was undertaken in one geographical area and therefore may not represent the views of other MCC. Nevertheless, this qualitative study provides an in-depth insight into the experiences of a small number of children and can therefore provide messages that may be useful for other MCC.

Furthermore, this chapter will include a critical examination of this research with reference to its strengths and limitations, suggestions for further study and implications for educational psychology. Lastly, I will conclude with some personal reflections on conducting the research, including a consideration of the impact of my role.

### 5.2. Summary of findings in relation to research questions

#### 5.2.1 Research question 1: What are the experiences (positive and negative) of MCC growing up with a parent in the military?

The children were able to recognise and identify a number of positive and negative experiences associated with their fathers' careers. The majority of positives outlined by the children concerned the *practical* benefits of an army career (e.g. wages). In general, I was struck by how the children talked more readily about the *challenges* associated with their lifestyle, rather than the opportunities. The literature review demonstrated that research has identified a number of challenges for MCC. Indeed challenges have been more readily identified by previous literature than advantages. In line with this, the children in the present study were able to identify a host of negative implications of their lifestyle and were more likely to identify negatives than positives associated with their lifestyle. Most of the negative consequences identified by the participants were related to the high levels of mobility integral to most military families, or to the absence of their fathers due to deployment. Most of the children talked about their father's deployments as having a negative impact upon them and

their families. As a group, they missed their fathers when they went away and, although, for many, this became easier to deal with over time, parental absence through deployment was a challenging feature for all of the children.

#### 5.2.2. Research question 2: How, if at all, do MCC feel that being from a military background has affected them educationally, socially or emotionally?

The children in the present study were asked a range of questions about how, if at all, they think their military background has affected them.

The findings with regard to educational impacts are interesting (see subtheme 1f). Almost all of the children answered 'no' when asked if they felt that being from a military background had affected their education. In this sense, the children felt on a par to their civilian counterparts in terms of their educational outcomes, a finding consistent with Ofsted (2011) who found no overall differences in terms of attainment between military and civilian children. However, although outcomes in terms of attainment may be similar, the findings from the present study indicate that a military child's school educational experience is different from less mobile populations. For example, the children were unanimous in having either repeated or omitted learning (usually both) as a result of mobility. Within the current fast-paced curriculum, this may mean that military children are missing out on important pieces of learning. It can also lead to increased pressure for MCC to 'catch-up' on missed learning; indeed some of the children talked about having to do this in school or at home. There can also be emotional implications to this, as some of the children expressed feeling inadequate or lacking in some way as they did not know as much about a topic as their peers.

As discussed previously, the participants reported that their lifestyles have implications for their social lives. These were largely negative, often incorporating feelings of loss around friendships. However, some children felt that their lifestyle also had benefits for their social lives as they had increased opportunities to meet people. Although it is difficult to make generalisations in such a small sample, it is worth noting that there was a trend for the girls to feel more positive socially than the boys.

The children illustrated a range of emotional responses to being a MCC. They expressed different worries and fears, most commonly related to their parents. Some of the children confided worrying about their father's safety; almost all of the children made references to war, combat or danger. Some of the children confided concerns about their fathers' emotional wellbeing as a result of deployments and being away from the family home. For Thomas, this was a particularly relevant issue as his father has PTSD as a result of deployments to Iraq. A few of the children expressed worries about their mothers, although this was less prevalent than worrying about fathers.

### 5.2.3. Research question 3: How can children from military families be best supported in schools and families?

To answer this research question, we must draw together findings from all three themes, with particular reference to the third ('what helps: promoting strategies and building resilience'). The findings from the present study lead to a number of potentially useful recommendations for schools and settings. Key messages regarding how to support MCC will be threaded throughout the remainder of this chapter, alongside a discussion of the findings in relation to previous research and the key psychological theories of belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems theory.

## 5.3. Belonging

### 5.3.1. The concept of belonging and previous application to MCC

As outlined in Chapter 2, psychologists have long argued that feeling accepted, embedded within a community (e.g. a school), and experiencing a sense of belonging are fundamental human psychological needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954; Osterman, 2000). As shown in Maslow's original five-tier model of needs below in Figure 5 (subsequent additions to the model have been proposed), a person's need to belong is social and emotional, is as significant as the need to feel loved and can be met through interpersonal relationships and affiliations to groups (e.g. school or community groups). Maslow posited that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, with basic needs at the bottom and psychological and self-fulfilment needs above. It follows therefore, that if our need for belonging is not met, it could have detrimental implications for the needs above, including self-esteem.

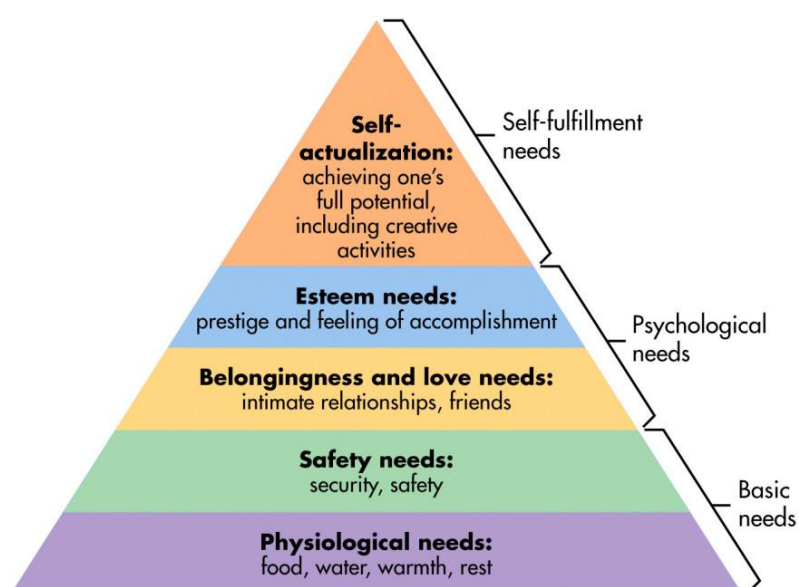


Figure 7: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2017)

Maslow's model has been long been applied to education and learning (e.g. Mosley, 2010; Gonzales-Dehass & Willems, 2012) with a focus on meeting pupils' needs so that they can

attain their educational potential and are motivated to become self-actualised learners. Belonging is particularly relevant to education, as schools can provide the environments and conditions to facilitate a sense of belonging in their pupils. There are many opportunities for pupils to acquire membership to groups within schools; for example, in their classes, forms, tutor groups, subject groups, extra-curricular clubs, sports teams etc.

To date, the concept of belonging has not been applied to MCC by research in any real depth. However, social inclusion and belonging has been shown to be problematic in other vulnerable and highly-transient groups, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children (Gould, 2017). In relation to MCC and belonging, Clifton (2007) found that MCC struggle to develop friendships and noted that they refrained from taking ownership of their schools, often referring to '*the school*', rather than '*my school*' during conversation. This study contained a very small sample (n=4) and Clifton did not compare findings with other groups, but a very detailed methodology, informed by an ethnographic case-study approach yielded an in-depth exploration of the experiences of adolescents from military families. The findings from these two studies suggest that belonging may be significant for MCC. It is possible that the high levels of mobility inherent to the military lifestyle could impact upon belonging for MCC.

### 5.3.2. Findings from the present study on belonging

In the interests of clarity, it should be noted that participants did not explicitly use the term 'belonging' during interviews. However, belonging is linked to feeling settled and embedded within a community. The participants used vocabulary associated with belonging throughout our discussions by frequently referring to 'settling' and 'feeling settled'. The general feeling expressed by the group was that relocations of school and/or home are unsettling, and therefore uncondusive to belonging; a finding replicated by other UK research (Children's Commissioner, 2018). Subthemes 1c, 1d and 1e all relate to notions of settling and stability. The participants yearned for greater stability and security in their home and educational placements, and look forward to a time when their fathers will leave the military and they can settle in one place, suggesting that frequent relocations can threaten a MCC's sense of belonging. Charlotte's interview may be further evidence of this; she was markedly more settled and content with her life than the other participants, perhaps due to the greater sense of belonging she experienced as a result of the consistency of her schooling. Charlotte talked about how important it was to her that her school setting remained the same even if her family home changed.

The present study identifies two features that can significantly affect a MCC's sense of belonging within a school setting. Firstly, for the children in this study, belonging is inextricably linked to friendship. Friends were of paramount importance to the children, as is to be expected with children of this age. Establishing positive social connections was linked by the children to the notion of feeling settled, and for most of the children, building social connections early is a mechanism for facilitating belonging in their new schools. The

participants who reported finding it easier to make friends were more settled and content in their schools than those who considered themselves less socially skilled (e.g. Kai and Thomas). The children valued different things in making friends. For some (e.g. Luke), sameness was reported as key; it is important for his sense of belonging to be around other MCC who have had similar experiences and who he can relate to. Others (e.g. Belle, Thomas and Ellie) had (either consciously or unconsciously) made their strongest friendships with *civilian* children. The benefit of these friendships was that their civilian friends are less mobile and therefore less likely to move away. It is possible that two human needs are working against each other here; the need for sameness versus the need for stability, both important for belonging.

Secondly, the children talked about feeling unsettled by differences between school settings. Molly, for example, reminisced fondly about her German school experience, and found it unsettling when she moved to the UK and experienced an education system very different to the one she was familiar with. Other children expressed similar views about having to adjust to different curricula, expectations and teaching approaches; all of which impacted upon their ability to settle and belong. In line with previous research (e.g. Children's Commissioner, 2018), the children in the present study had all either repeated or omitted learning experiences (usually both) as a result of mobility. Within the current fast-paced curriculum, this may mean that MCC are missing out on important learning and can lead to pressure for MCC to 'catch-up'; some of the participants discussed having to do extra work at school or at home. This negatively impacted upon some of the participants' sense of belonging by making them feel different or inadequate as they did not have the same knowledge as their peers.

### 5.3.3. Implications for supporting MCC with belonging

From these findings, some suggestions for schools and educational professionals arise. I suggest that schools are mindful of the concept of belonging when a MCC first arrives, and the focus for initial intervention should be on fostering a sense of belonging as rapidly as possible. A key finding from the present study is that MCC are often resourceful in finding ways to settle within their new communities (school and home) and thus improve their sense of belonging (linked to their resilience, see later in chapter). Strategies adopted by the children rely heavily upon social interactions and interpersonal relationships, and schools can play a role in supporting this by having mechanisms in place to help MCC build relationships quickly. It is crucial that schools have thorough and robust pastoral systems that can attend to MCC's social and emotional needs. It seems important to carefully monitor the social activity of newly arrived MCC and to ensure they are successfully building attachments with other children. Schools should be alert to early signs that a MCC is not establishing friendships (e.g. through monitoring at playtimes) and this should be a red flag, indicating that they are at risk of negative outcomes. Schools could respond to this in a variety of ways, both preventatively and responsively using formal and informal approaches. Formal methods could include a buddy system (the participants who experienced this in their schools reported buddies to be helpful) or evidence-based structured social skills programmes (e.g. 'Friends for



Life', Barrett, 2010). Informal methods could include creating additional social opportunities within the daily timetable. It is important that MCC are given access to children from both military and civilian backgrounds.

Another way in which schools can facilitate belonging for MCC is by building understanding and empathy amongst *all* children in a school, including those from a civilian background. It was important to many of the children in the present study that their civilian counterparts have a good knowledge and understanding of their lifestyle. This finding is particularly relevant to schools with lower numbers of MCC on roll, to avoid MCC feeling ostracised or different. Educating the rest of the class about the challenges and celebrations of military culture seems important and could facilitate belonging for MCC in schools of mixed populations.

In addition to social needs, schools can improve belonging by attending to academic needs. It is important that schools recognise that MCC may well be coming from very different school systems (sometimes from other countries) and used to different teaching methods and expectations. There should be more emphasis on transition between settings and thorough handovers (see later discussion). Teachers should have a good grasp of MCC's starting points as well as an awareness that MCC will have repeated or missed out on learning as a consequence of mobility. One way in which schools could tackle this would be for staff to conduct an audit of key skills or topics with newly-arrived MCC, to ensure learning gaps are quickly identified and addressed. MCC should be supported to embed new routines and expectations as quickly as possible. Schools could be creative in how they do this, perhaps involving peers writing welcome letters to be sent in advance, or student handbooks/packs for new MCC detailing key information.

## 5.4. Attachment

### 5.4.1. The concept of attachment and previous application to MCC

Attachment theory relates to the formation and maintenance of close bonds between children and caregivers (see Chapter 2). Previous research has viewed MCC through the lens of attachment theory and hypothesised that parental deployments can disrupt attachment relationships between parents and their children, which can in turn, negatively affect child outcomes (e.g. Louie & Cromer, 2014; Lowe et al, 2012; Lieberman & Van Horn, 2013).

Louie and Cromer (2014) explored military father's perspectives of attachment and how attachments can be affected by the deployment cycle (pre, during and post-deployment). 30 US military fathers with young children (aged <6) were interviewed in person (n=21) or by telephone (n=9). A mixed-methods research design was employed, with qualitative interview data and quantitative data collected from a standardised parental stress scale. The authors aimed to explore the impact of three issues on attachment: 1) child-focused preparation strategies prior to deployment, 2) communication during deployment, and 3) reintegration experiences. Interestingly, 11 out of the 30 (37%) fathers did not prepare their children at all

for their deployments; the most common reason given being the age of the children and the perception that they were too young to understand. Although many fathers made the decision not to prepare their children for deployment, the study showed interesting findings on the effects of this decision. Fathers who chose *not* to prepare reported significantly higher levels of parenting stress. The authors conclude that preparing children for deployment is essential for attachment:

*“The qualitative data from this study revealed a need among military families with young children for age-appropriate strategies for preparing their children for the deployment”* (pg. 500).

The authors make bold statements regarding the wellbeing of military children:

*“Out of sight is not out of mind for these young children, and failing to adequately prepare them for parental separation may leave them sad, confused, and incorrectly blaming themselves for the separation”* (pg. 500).

However, it must be remembered that the study relied purely on retrospective service-member parental report, from only one parent in the family. Surveying the mothers or direct observations of the children may well have offered different insights into the same families. However, the study provides an interesting spotlight on attachment and recommends supporting military families to adopt attachment-friendly strategies at all stages of the deployment cycle to improve outcomes for their children:

*“[The] promotion of deployed parent–child attachment relationship could potentially increase resilience in all family members throughout the deployment cycle”* (pg. 502).

Other research has found that extended deployments can threaten the *remaining* parents’ attachments with their children. Lowe et al (2012) surveyed 30 US military wives, using two standardised measures: the parenting relationship questionnaire (PRQ) and the parenting stress index (PSI) to assess parent-child relationships. They found that lengthy deployments can cause remaining parents to *“detach from the parent–child relationship”* (pg. 17). The researchers hypothesised that the additional responsibilities that remaining parents are forced to adopt during deployments can create a distance between parents and children and threaten the security of parent-child attachments.

Also in the US, Posada et al (2015) surveyed mothers with deployed spouses about their relationships with their children. Mothers who reported positive attachments with their children were also more likely to report good quality interactions with their children, lower rates of maternal depression and higher levels of father involvement. The study included a large sample (n=292) of military wives, and relied on concurrent rather than retrospective data, two important strengths of the study. However, the research lacked a control group, relied purely on maternal reports, and used data collected from one point in time, rather than longitudinally. Furthermore, for the purposes of the present study, again, we rely on US data and thus must apply caution when applying to a UK population. In a similar finding, Creech et

al's (2014) review of the literature found that *"the caregiver's mental health is associated with children's response to deployment"* (pg. 458).

#### 5.4.2. Findings from the present study on attachment

The present study explored attachment from a different perspective than the research cited above; from the children themselves. A number of findings related to attachment arose from the study.

When talking about negatives associated with their lifestyle, all of the children talked about their father's deployments having a negative impact upon them and their families. Negative consequences of deployment were described as both emotional (e.g. sadness as a result of lack of contact) and practical (e.g. taking on additional responsibilities at home), in a finding similar to Chandra et al (2010), Knobloch et al (2015) and Huebner et al (2007) who also found shifting family dynamics and responsibilities be features of military life. As a group, the children missed their fathers when they went away and although for many, this became easier to cope with over time, parental absence through deployment was described by the participants as one of the most challenging aspects of their lifestyle. This finding is in line with other literature which argues deployment to be inherently stressful, such as Esqueda et al (2012), Creech et al (2014) and Jain et al (2016), who found in their UK adolescent sample that the most frequent answer to the question *'What are the worst things about having a military father?'* was lack of contact with their fathers (61%).

However, and encouragingly, despite frequent and often extended periods of separation, the participants in the present study reported being very attached to their fathers. They talked about their fathers a great deal and expressed strong feelings of attachment towards them. They sought ways in which to maintain and strengthen attachments to their fathers whilst they were away from the family home and were resourceful in finding ways to do this (e.g. using objects of personal significance).

Additionally to fathers, and in line with previous research (e.g. Lowe et al, 2012; Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015; Palmer, 2008; Posada et al, 2015), the participants also talked about their mothers as important for their coping. The children talked about their mothers in two significant ways. Firstly, many of the children recognised that deployment places additional strain on their mothers as the remaining parent. Some participants talked about their mothers missing their fathers or recognised that lone parenting is challenging. Secondly, it was clear in the children's comments that their mothers are a constant and reassuring presence that is important and valued. The children alluded to their mothers as an important source of support and therefore identified them as a protective factor (see discussion on resilience).

All of the children in the present study were in two-parent families. It would be interesting to compare these findings with MCC from single-parent families to see how deployments affect attachments in these more challenging circumstances. Also, although the children acknowledged difficulties for their mothers, none of them alluded to their mothers not

coping, or disclosed negative relations with their mothers. Their attachments to their mothers appeared to be secure and intact, despite the challenges that deployments bring.

Overall, the findings from the present study are encouraging from an attachment theory perspective and show that despite the challenges of extended and repeated familial separations, attachments with both parents can remain secure. However, the children's responses do highlight a number of ways in which MCC's attachments can be protected.

#### 5.4.3. Implications for supporting MCC with attachment

The children's responses around attachment have important implications for family life. For example, and in line with previous research (Children's Commissioner, 2018), many of the children expressed a need for continued connection to their deployed parent or to friends left behind. The children were innovative in finding ways to create a sense of connection, from maintaining contact (e.g. using technology) to the exchanging of treasured objects. For half of the children in the study, objects were particularly significant. Objects were used by the children in different ways; given to or received from deployed parents, or, as in Ellie's case, hidden in her father's luggage to 'watch over him' whilst he was away. Objects were also used to support connections with friends left behind. For those who used objects in this way, they held great significance and were a comforting feature. The use of objects with young children to promote connectedness would be beneficial for parents to consider.

Another way in which to facilitate attachments with deployed parents is through the provision of timely and age-appropriate information. For example, the children in the present study talked about wanting access to information about their fathers' deployments whilst they are away. There is an important caveat here. Most of the children associated a military career with war and danger, so providing accurate information is important in order to allay concerns. However, it is crucial that information is timely and age-appropriate. Previous research by Owlett et al (2015) showed that US military adolescents wanted *some* information about their parents' deployments but did not want to know too much about risk and/or danger. Risk and danger as a topic was not raised directly with the children in the present study due to their age, but some of them confided and discussed their fears themselves. It is important to strike a balance between keeping MCC children informed about their fathers but avoiding feeding their anxieties. The *timing* of information is also important; one of the participants told me that she does not want to receive information too far in advance of a deployment or relocation as this leads to an extended period of worry. It is also important to note that for many of the children (n=3), the period before their father going is the most stressful time for them. Minimising this time to prevent anticipatory worry whilst meeting the children's need for information is a tricky balance for parents.

In addition to families, a number of the present findings can also be useful for schools in order to support attachment. As previously expressed, the present study emphasised the remaining parent as key to MCC's coping. It is therefore crucial to protect the emotional wellbeing of

military spouses, and schools can play a role in this. Schools should consider interventions which support military spouses and draw them into the school community, perhaps by involving parents and MCC working together or creating ‘communities of care’ around MCC and their families (Kudler & Porter, 2013; Berkowitz et al, 2014). EPs have been involved with supporting military spouses before (Hogg, Hart & Collins, 2014). In Hampshire, EPs ran individual parent consultations and group information/discussion sessions with military spouses in schools and homes. Although small-scale (five parents for the individual consultation and up to nine parents in the group sessions), feedback was positive, with an *“overall decrease in concern and an increase in confidence”* (pg. 173) amongst parents reported following the intervention. This type of intervention could have implications not only for attachment, but also for belonging. Parents in the Hogg et al study reported they felt isolated and a lack of belonging within their community.

## 5.5. Resilience

### 5.5.1. The concept of resilience and previous application to MCC

Resilience is commonly defined as the positive or protective mechanisms that mitigate against poor outcomes in the presence of risk. The concept of resilience has been applied to military children by an increasing number of researchers (e.g. Weber & Weber, 2005; Oshri et al, 2015; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Masten, 2013; Garcia et al, 2015; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Wadsworth et al, 2017; Saltzman et al, 2013).

As argued in Chapter 2, military families are under considerable stress, due to factors such as high levels of mobility and parental absence through deployment and are arguably exposed to higher levels of stress than their civilian counterparts. Paradis (2014) highlights how military families are exposed to *“unique risks such as army culture, possible bereavement and injury, post-deployment reunion, transitions and relocations”* (pg. 2); conditions which simply do not affect civilian populations in the same way. Therefore, studying MCC presents researchers with valuable opportunities to explore children’s responses to risk:

*“Deployments require a complex series of adjustments by families that may include relocating, reallocating household responsibilities, or changing schools and medical providers, deployments may also study opportunities to study accumulations of risk over time”* (Wadsworth et al, 2017).

However, we must rely on US literature to explore MCC and resilience. Oshri et al (2015) explored family functioning and resiliency outcomes in military families by surveying parents and children using a range of measures (largely involving questionnaires with Likert-scale responses). The research is complex and dense, and the analysis complicated by the researchers including a vast array of measures and analyses, making findings difficult to interpret with clarity. However, researchers identified a range of different family ‘types’ or profiles, including balanced, unbalanced, midrange and rigidly balanced, with each type demonstrating a different type of family functioning pattern. The most relevant finding for

the present study was that authors concluded that family functioning does play a significant role in *“either contributing to or buffering the effects linked to child adversity experiences”* (pg. 59). In other words, a successful and supportive family dynamic builds resilience amongst MCC which can improve their ability to cope with adverse experiences, such as parental deployment or relocation.

#### 5.5.2. Findings from the present study on resilience

The first key message from the present study regarding resilience is an optimistic and positive one. This study shows that, despite the confirmation that MCC are indeed vulnerable and face a number of challenges, they can also be highly resilient and difficulties should not be presumed as inevitable. This is evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of participants expressed mixed feelings about their lifestyle, and all were able to acknowledge benefits associated with their military status as well as challenges. Theme 2 (benefits and opportunities) confirms previous research (e.g. Jain et al, 2016) by illustrating how participants were able to identify a range of positives of growing up as a MCC. Overall, and similarly to previous research (Children’s Commissioner 2018) the children in this study presented themselves as resilient and pragmatic group.

However, the findings also make some suggestions about how the label of ‘resilient’ should be applied to MCC. Firstly, a key, and concerning finding from the present study is that, in efforts to appear resilient, some MCC deliberately conceal their worries or negative emotions from others. In a finding similar to Owlett et al (2015), I found that three of the eight participants disclosed withholding their emotions in this way. Molly represented the most extreme example of this, having not confided her overwhelming feelings of loss and sadness about her relocation to anyone prior to the interview. Charlotte and Thomas also concealed their emotions from others in an attempt to appear more resilient to others. Thomas did not want to embarrass himself in front of others. Molly did not want to tarnish the reputation she felt others have of her as a ‘happy girl’. These participants had not confided their feelings in those closest to them; their families, as would be expected for children of this age. This led me to reflect on previous findings by Becker et al (2014) and Esqueda et al (2012) who found military families to be less likely to seek assistance, possibly due to a ‘self-reliance’ ethic present in military culture. The concepts of toughness, resilience and having a ‘stiff upper lip’ have long permeated public perceptions of the military. Molly’s desire to present herself as a ‘happy girl’ may be indicative of this. The study therefore cautions against the widespread application of the label of ‘resilient’ to *all* MCC at *all* times.

The findings from the present study lend strength to the depiction of resilience as a fluid concept. Conversations with the children revealed that their resilience to the challenges of military life fluctuates in relation to individual circumstances. Understandably, it appears that MCC have increased vulnerability immediately following a relocation of home or school. The present findings also support the notion of a deployment cycle (Pye et al, 2017; Lincoln &

Sweeten, 2011; Oyhe et al, 2016; Huebner et al, 2007; Chandra et al, 2010; Kudler & Porter, 2013). Although none of the children had heard the term before, they immediately related to the concept when it was explained to them and described challenges unique to each stage of the cycle. Contrary to previous research by Huebner et al (2007) and Chandra et al (2010), reintegration was not reported by the participants as the most difficult time, with all of them expressing anticipatory excitement regarding reunions with their deployed fathers. For some, the period immediately prior to a deployment is particularly difficult, whereas others were more likely to struggle whilst their fathers were away.

Lastly, the present study demonstrates that MCC are active agents in fostering their own resilience and making use of protective factors (see Theme 3). I was struck by the capacity the participants have to innovate ways of promoting their own resilience by drawing upon the support networks around them as well as their own resources. Participants describing taking steps to actively build their social networks in new schools and developing coping mechanisms to see them through difficult times (e.g. using objects, creating opportunities for quality time with parents or friends they are about to be separated from).

#### 5.5.3. Implications for supporting MCC with resilience

The findings above have implications for how MCC can be supported at home and in schools. In line with previous literature, this study supports the notion that schools and families should promote the development of positive factors to boost the resilience of MCC (Russo & Fallon, 2015; Dent & Cameron, 2003). Rather than focusing on military status per se, I suggest that schools should view high levels of mobility and repeated parental absence as risk factors, which can be either compounded or mitigated against by an individual MCC's personality characteristics. The present study has identified two important protective factors for MCC; remaining parents and friendships. Schools should provide the conditions to promote these protective factors; ways to do this have been presented elsewhere (see attachment and belonging).

The findings show how MCC are affected by feelings of instability and uncertainty (see subthemes 1c, 1d and 1e). It is therefore important to provide places of safety, consistency and stability (De Pedro, 2014). Schools can do this in the implicit and explicit messages they communicate to MCC. For example, creating a school ethos with clear and consistently high expectations, predictable consequences for behaviour management and open and honest dialogues between staff and students will all increase safety and stability.

It is important for those closely supporting MCC (e.g. parents, teachers) to be aware that some MCC mask their difficult emotions in an attempt to appear more resilient. It is therefore crucial that parents acknowledge that some aspects of military life are challenging for their children and to foster openness and sensitivity at home, in order to provide an emotionally safe environment where children feel able to confide their worries, fears and doubts.

Additionally, it is important to recognise that schools are mindful of the emotional implications of being a MCC and channel pastoral support accordingly. As the findings suggest that MCC may not talk to their families about the emotional implications of their lifestyles, it is important that schools meet the emotional needs of their MCC by potentially filling this gap and being attuned to feelings of loss, sadness and guilt. There is a role for both formal and informal approaches here. For example, the EP-led Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme (Burton, 2008) is gaining momentum in many schools and would be appropriate for this group. The programme seeks to develop Teaching Assistant (TA) knowledge and skills by providing TA training and EP supervision, combining both psychological theory and practical guidance, to meet the social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils. A less formal example of intervention would be to allocate an empathetic adult keyworker to all newly-arrived MCC, whom they can build a warm and trusting relationship with and turn to when they have concerns. Some of the children talked about wanting more emotional support in school. For some MCC, simply having warm, empathetic and available adults nearby may be enough in itself to provide reassurance. In line with previous research (Children's Commissioner, 2018), some of the participants alluded to the school environment as a protective factor and a place to escape the stresses of family life. For these children, creating a whole-school culture of warmth, emotional openness, availability and a protective climate (Esqueda et al, 2012) may be more important than a specific intervention.

The findings regarding the fluid nature of resilience support the notion that there may be critical periods in a MCC's life where they are more vulnerable and likely to require additional support. Schools should endeavour to equip themselves with the relevant knowledge and information to tailor appropriate support for MCC pupils, such as deployment timetables. Relationships between staff and parents should be nurtured in order to ease the transfer of information between home and school (see later discussion under bio-ecological systems theory).

Lastly, the findings from the present study support an argument for schools to adopt a strengths-based approach to intervention. Many of the children perceived themselves to be skilled in building relationships with others as a consequence of mobility. Schools could build upon this by recognising and praising MCC's capacity for relationship-building, and harness this skill to help others; perhaps by allocating MCC to social leadership roles (e.g. supporting younger or newly-arrived children, becoming playground buddies, or running peer-led social skills groups). MCC have important messages for other children, whether military or civilian, about how to form relationships. Equally, for those MCC who see themselves as less-skilled in this area than others (e.g. Thomas), viewing friendship-making as a skill means that it can be explicitly taught, practised and refined. Some MCC, particularly those who are socially-reticent, could be targeted early for intervention, perhaps using an evidence-based social skills programme (e.g. Friends for Life, Barrett, 2010) or less formal methods, such as teachers creating social opportunities within the daily timetable.



## 5.6. Bio-ecological systems theory

### 5.6.1. Bio-ecological systems theory and previous application to MCC

The bio-ecological systems theory of human development was outlined in Chapter 2 (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This model suggests that each person's development is influenced by five systemic layers present within our environment: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems (see Figure 6 below). The theory states that the systems around a person interact with individual characteristics to direct the individual's development, behaviours and outcomes. I feel that this model fits especially well with the current study because of the key themes that were found around how best to support MCC in families and schools.

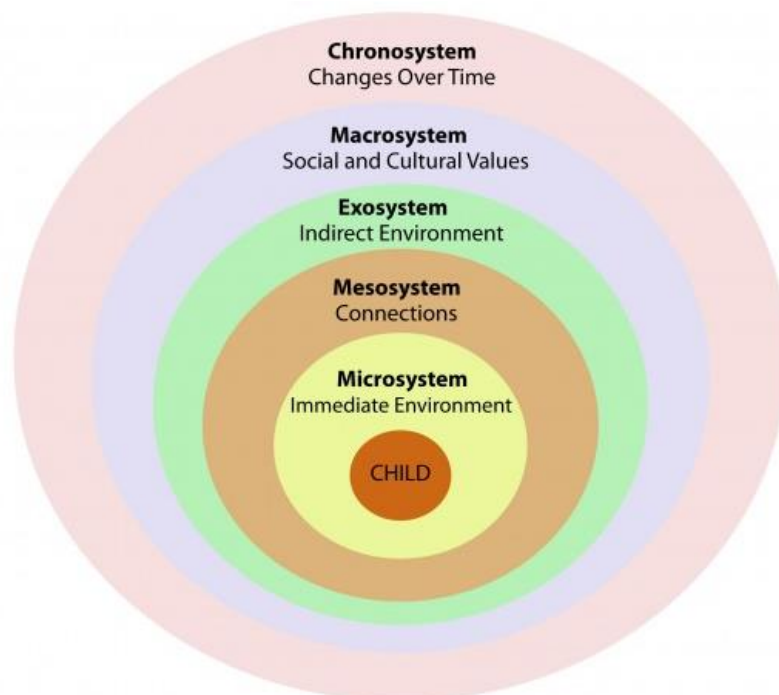


Figure 8: Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory

A very small body of literature (theoretical rather than empirical) has considered MCC from a systems and ecological perspective (e.g. Kudler & Porter, 2013; Paley et al, 2013, Masten, 2013). In a call to action, Kudler and Porter (2013) argue for interventions that work on linking systems together by building 'communities of care' around military children. This approach advocates 'joined up thinking' between homes, schools and communities, leading to a deeper understanding of military culture, including an appreciation of the challenges they face:

*"We ought to focus on recognizing military children and addressing their problems in close proximity to their homes, schools, community organizations, and doctor's offices" (pg. 181).*

They review a number of attempts at building communities of care, the main problem being that virtually no scientific evidence exists as to effectiveness. The authors argue that for

effective communities of care, both policy (e.g. shared understanding, robust identification procedures etc.) and practice (e.g. capacity, availability, partnerships/links with families and communities etc.) must be in place. If we apply this to schools, questions should be asked about whether schools have robust procedures in place for identifying MCC and whether staff have an adequate understanding of needs and how to meet them, the capacity to meet needs and adjust practice accordingly, and sufficient mechanisms for evaluating interventions.

Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013) used an ecological perspective to specifically consider the family system interplay between different elements of a system affects outcomes (e.g. a deployed father's experience of PTSD will impact upon the other family members, or marital discord will affect the children). The authors also consider a social ecological perspective that takes into account systems outside the family. They argue that for each deployment, a family could respond differently, depending on the quality of the systems they currently inhabit (e.g. a particularly supportive school or a close-knit community). This has clear links to resilience (discussed earlier in the chapter).

Masten (2013) linked systems theory to risk and resilience, arguing that risk and resilience should be viewed at different levels or systems (e.g. family, military, individual) and pointing out that a threat (e.g. deployment) to one system (e.g. an individual child) can disturb the function of the other interconnected systems (e.g. the family).

#### 5.6.2. Findings from the present study regarding bio-ecological systems theory

The present study has important messages for three of the systems in the bio-ecological systems model: micro, meso and exo. I have focused on these three layers as they are arguably the most amenable to change. Individuals in a MCC's microsystems are those who have direct day-to-day contact with them, such as parents and teachers. Important messages for MCC's microsystems have therefore been addressed in previous sections regarding belonging, attachment and resilience. Here, therefore, I shall focus on recommendations concerning the *mesosystem* layer (interactions between microsystems) and *exosystems* (e.g. whole-school policies and practices).

##### 5.6.2.1. Mesosystems

Mesosystems refer to connections and interactions between an individual's microsystems. The most pertinent example of this in relation to the present study, are the relationships between military families and schools. It is clear, both from talking with participants, their parents, and the informal discussions had with school staff (including a SENCo, Teachers, a Trainee Teacher and a Headteacher) during data collection, that there is scope for improvement in the communication between schools, and between families and schools. This finding has been echoed in previous literature (e.g. Ohye et al, 2016; Chandra et al, 2010; Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2011; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Berkowitz et al, 2014). As previously

argued, it is essential that schools seek ongoing dialogues with families so that they are informed about the individual circumstances of children.

As well as communicating with families as a whole, the present study supports previous research which shows that the coping of the remaining parent is significantly associated with the coping of the child (Posada et al, 2015; Creech et al, 2014, Huebner et al, 2007; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Palmer, 2008) and schools should find ways to draw military families closer to school life and build ‘communities of care’ around military children and their families (Kudler & Porter, 2013; Berkowitz et al, 2014) by supporting remaining parents (see findings on attachment for practical suggestions).

#### 5.6.2.2. Exosystems

In relation to whole-school policies and procedure, the present study supports previous research which has found that MCC’s transitions between schools is not as thorough as it could or should be (Ofsted, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, 2016). All children reported gaps and/or repetition of learning and many described differences between schools as unsettling. My informal discussions with school staff during data collection confirmed that schools are not consistent in passing on records or pupil information, a finding confirmed by Ofsted (2011):

*“Systems of transfer of children’s records between schools were uncoordinated and important information was delayed or did not arrive at all” (pg. 6).*

Children often arrive at new schools with little notice and even less documentation. The failure to pass on information is particularly problematic when a child has SEND, as demonstrated by Kai (see Appendix 6 for Kai’s vignette). At the time of interview, Kai was midway through an assessment for autism. Kai’s parents had been against seeking a diagnostic label for him (as is perfectly in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice which emphasises *needs* over diagnoses), but they felt compelled to pursue this route as each time he moved schools, lack of teacher knowledge about Kai’s needs meant that classroom support was not initially forthcoming. Pursuing a diagnostic label (and the associated paper trail) was therefore something they felt coerced to seek, despite their views around labelling children. There should be an improvement in school academic and pastoral systems monitoring MCC more effectively, and more emphasis on thorough handovers between settings so that schools are not ill-prepared for new arrivals and consequently fail to understand or meet MCC’s needs.

One way in which to counter this problem would be to use the SPP to appoint a key person or advocate for MCC in schools. This role could be both administrative and pastoral, ensuring an effective transition (including the transfer of records) and overseeing family liaison by building links between military families and school. The difficulties I had with recruitment (see later reflective account) and the existing literature around military families’ engagement with services (e.g. Farrell & Collier, 2010; Berkowitz et al, 2014; Chandra et al, 2010; Becker et al,

2014, De Pedro et al, 2014) suggest that this role may be best performed by someone with pre-existing military connections.

The recommendations for supporting MCC, discussed above in relation to the four psychological theories of belonging, attachment, resilience and bio-ecological systems are summarised below in Table 2.

Psychological theory	Practical recommendations for home/school
Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carefully monitor the social activity of newly-arrived MCC (e.g. through playtime observations). Have mechanisms in place to intervene early if it becomes apparent that social connections are not being made.</li> <li>• Increase social opportunities for MCC with other military <i>and</i> civilian children, making use of both formal and informal approaches (e.g. buddy systems, lunchtime clubs, joint/group learning activities in the classroom).</li> <li>• For children struggling to make friendships, consider structured intervention (e.g. an evidence-based social skills programme).</li> <li>• Conduct whole-class work with <i>all</i> children (including civilian) to improve general understanding of the challenges and celebrations of military life and build empathy amongst all children.</li> <li>• Address MCC's academic needs, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Conduct an audit of learning/topics already studied for newly-arrived MCC to avoid repetition.</li> <li>○ Quickly identify and address any gaps in learning,</li> <li>○ Ensure a thorough handover between settings</li> <li>○ Support newly-arrived MCC to quickly embed new routines and expectations (e.g. using peer coaching, welcome letters sent in advance, or a student handbook)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Attachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find ways to encourage a sense of connection between MCC and deployed parents and/or friends 'left behind' (e.g. by exchanging treasured objects, maintaining contact using letters or technology).</li> <li>• Provide timely access to age-appropriate information to MCC about impending changes (e.g. a parents' deployment or an upcoming relocation).</li> <li>• Consider ways in schools or communities to support remaining parents (e.g. running support groups, parent workshops, recruiting military spouses as parent helpers in the classroom).</li> </ul>

Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and teachers to be aware that MCC may conceal or mask negative feelings, even from their families. Provide warm and emotionally safe environments at home so that MCC feel able to confide.</li> <li>• In school, consider ways to communicate messages of safety, stability and security to MCC (e.g. have clear, consistent and predictable expectations and behaviour management strategies, foster open communication, maintain dialogues with MCC about their home circumstances).</li> <li>• Find ways to enhance the protective factors that mitigate against the challenges of military life (e.g. supporting parents, prioritising relationships within the school).</li> <li>• Have mechanisms in school to meet the emotional needs of MCC (e.g. ELSAs, keyworkers).</li> <li>• Cultivate a whole-school culture of warmth, empathy, emotional openness and availability.</li> <li>• Be mindful that the resilience of MCC is fluid. Schools to ensure they are well-informed about changes in individual MCC's circumstances (e.g. deployment cycles, friends moving away) and be prepared to provide additional support when required.</li> <li>• Consider using strength-based approaches with MCC. For example, view relationship-building as a skill to be utilised and praised in those who excel (e.g. allocating social roles of responsibility) and nurtured in those who struggle (provide social skills support).</li> </ul>
Bio-ecological systems model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools and homes to consider the different systems which MCC inhabit and to plan provision across different systems, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Microsystems: See above recommendations for those in direct contact with MCC to support their needs.</li> <li>○ Mesosystems: Ensure effective communication between schools sending and receiving MCC. Ensure regular communications between schools and military families and maintain ongoing dialogues. Consider strategies to support military spouses and ways to bring them into the community of the school.</li> <li>○ Exosystems: Formalise thorough and robust systems and procedures to ensure a smooth transition, including the thorough handover of pupil records. Appoint a key person in schools to act as a link coordinator and advocate for MCC.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

*Table 2: Summary of recommendations to support MCC in families and schools*

## 5.7. Critical consideration of the research

A critical examination of the present research will follow, with consideration of the strengths and limitations.

### 5.7.1. Strengths, positive features of the study and unique contribution

As previously stated, previous literature on this topic hails largely from the US. Furthermore, the vast majority of research on MCC's outcomes and experiences has been conducted using third-person accounts, usually parents or teachers. As far as I am aware, this is the first qualitative study on this topic carried out using individual interviews with primary-school-age military connected children in the UK to date.

Some of the strengths of this research arise from the choice of methodology. Firstly, the qualitative exploratory methodology chosen allows a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of MCC from the perspectives of the children themselves, *in their own words*. Although the needs and outcomes of MCC have been explored by previous researchers, the promotion of children's voices is a strength of the present study. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed the children to shape their own interviews and discuss the issues they felt to be most pertinent to their lives. I feel this choice of method reflects my intention to empower the participants to tell their own stories. The data analysis method of thematic analysis was sufficiently flexible to respond to changes within the research design.

Other positive features arise from the sample. Primary-school-age children were selected for interview, which responds to a significant gap in previous research. Furthermore, a mixture of boys and girls was recruited, from different schools and different school systems. This offers perspectives from MCC living in different circumstances. However, the children also had a number of heterogeneous qualities; e.g. their age and their family makeup. The children were similar enough to one another to draw comparisons and identify themes.

### 5.7.2. Limitations of, and difficulties with the study

As with all research, there are limitations to the present study. Firstly, it would have been legitimate to have adopted a different methodology and method of data analysis. Thematic analysis was originally chosen as prior to data collection, my intention was to collect data from a variety of sources. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that can be applied to a multitude of data types (e.g. interviews, surveys) in order to generate themes. With hindsight, other data analysis methods would also have been suitable. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), for example, is concerned with lived experience and would have been appropriate for this group. Grounded theory could also have been appropriate due to the novel nature of this research. A narrative approach using case studies would also have been relevant, given the small number of participants. When selecting my method and

methodology, my sample size was unknown which was one of the reasons I chose a flexible methodology.

Recruitment was a difficulty within the present study (see reflective account below). I underestimated the barriers to recruitment and as a result, changed my sampling strategy and research design. Ideally, I would have collected data from schools and/or parents to triangulate my data. Reflecting on my sample, I wonder if it is possible that those families who volunteered their children to take part in the study, did so because they had positive outcomes. If so, there is the possibility of bias in my sample. Furthermore, I had initially hoped to recruit more child participants (ideally 10-15). It was important to me to generate some findings that would be useful for schools. I would have therefore been more satisfied if I had recruited more participants in order to collect more data and strengthen my themes.

### 5.8. Implications for further research

The present study, and previous literature adds to the picture of children's adjustment to, and coping with the challenges of military life, as well as shining a light on some of the positives of a military lifestyle. However, many gaps in our knowledge remain.

With regard to the education of MCC, it was shown in the literature review that a range of interventions have been implemented in schools. However, scarce research exists to date which evaluates the *impact* of school-based interventions (Esqueda et al, 2012). More research on the efficacy of interventions with this group is needed, particularly including children's voices.

It would be interesting to compare the outcomes and pupil views between schools with greater and fewer numbers of MCC. Chandra et al (2010) found that in schools with less military children on roll, MCC are prone to feeling isolated. The present study shows that some MCC seek sameness with others and prefer to be around other MCC, whereas others gravitate towards civilian children in order to seek stability and consistency in their relationships. It would therefore be interesting to compare the experiences of MCC in schools with greater and fewer MCC. Linked to this, it would be also interesting to speak with *civilian* children about their experiences of sharing a school with MCC. Informal conversations with staff during this study revealed that often, staff are more concerned about the wellbeing of 'children left behind'. Discussions with one parent supported this view; she talked about her own children's gains in terms of resilience as a result of mobility. They were excited by the adventure of moving somewhere new but at the same time, left behind devastated civilian friends they had connected with.

### 5.9. Implications for Educational Psychology

The findings of this study present opportunities for Educational Psychologists (EPs).

The findings show that military children are a highly mobile group, who are exposed to additional levels of stress. Although negative outcomes are by no means inevitable, as a group, MCC are vulnerable. At an individual, group and organisational level, I would therefore argue that military children should have a presence on EPs' radar. This is particularly pertinent to EPs working in counties with high proportions of military families. In the LA in which I was on placement, for example, there are a significant number of schools with medium to high proportions of military children on roll, yet supporting children with these backgrounds is given little EP attention. One of the core features of EP work is that we work at many different levels, including systemically (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). EPs are in a prime position to use psychological theories such as those discussed in this chapter to work at systemic levels, both within schools and LAs. For example, at the beginning of each year, EPs in many LAs meet with school decision-makers to discuss the needs of vulnerable children in schools and plan the provision to meet them for the upcoming year. During these conversations, EPs ask questions about individuals and populations identified as vulnerable, such as looked-after-children or children from traveller backgrounds. I would argue that MCC should be part of this discussion. EPs also often play a role in supporting schools to develop, tailor and plan appropriate intervention, policies and practices.

Furthermore, EPs should remain informed by keeping up-to-date with current research and legislation around the needs of military children in order to communicate this to schools. EPs have a duty to bring awareness of the unique challenges that MCC face to schools, in order to work preventatively and affect meaningful change for individuals and groups. Wherever possible, EPs should involve themselves in conducting research into the needs and suitable provision for this group. A key message for EPs would be that gaining access and engagement from military families in research can be challenging (see reflective account below). EPs may need to be creative when recruiting participants or consider 'ways in' to facilitate access to this highly mobile, and in some ways, elusive group.

This research shows that some children cope better than others, with increased challenges a military lifestyle can bring. One explanation for these differences, suggested in psychological literature and by this research, is that some children have enhanced resiliency due to access to more protective factors. Supporting schools to build children's resilience by enhancing protective factors is already a core component of EP work. To apply this specifically to MCC, it is important that EPs recognise these protective factors and to support the school with creating an environment that can foster them. For example, the present study shows that friendships and experiencing a sense of belonging is important for some MCC. Therefore, EPs should be signposting schools towards interventions that target these.

#### 5.10. [Some personal reflections on conducting this research](#)

My most significant reflection on conducting this research is that I have been afforded a privileged experience, in meeting and talking with the children in my sample. I have been left



with the impression of these particular children as a group which faces adversity as a result of their military lifestyles, and for some children, at some times, these challenges can be overwhelming. However, my overriding reflections upon MCC are that they are resilient and resourceful in terms of their coping strategies.

An exception to this was Molly, whose interview raised an ethical dilemma for me. Molly was extremely keen to participate in the study, however, she found talking about her life difficult and emotional. Several times throughout the interview Molly dissolved into tears. Ethically, I questioned whether to continue with Molly's interview. However, thankfully, I had anticipated such an event during the process of ethical approval (see Chapter 3). I checked with Molly throughout that she was happy to continue, which she was, and I asked for her permission to speak post-interview with adults who knew her well in school and at home. Molly accepted this intervention and so I spoke with her Teaching Assistant immediately after the interview, and her father, later by telephone. These conversations confirmed Molly's statements about not confiding in adults as both were surprised to hear about Molly's distress. I was thankful in this instance to be able to draw upon my experiences as a teacher and trainee Educational Psychologist of working with vulnerable children.

As previously discussed, this research evolved along its journey and involved a number of challenges. The most difficult of obstacles was gaining access to participants. I have reflected a great deal on why gaining access to, and then achieving consent from families was so problematic. With hindsight, I can see that I was naïve regarding recruitment. Although I live very near to a military community, I underestimated the difficulties I would have. I believe the main barriers were in the schools and the parents rather than the children. In response to this obstacle, I adapted my recruitment strategy a number of times (see Chapter 3). One of these attempts involved some direct advertising within a school with a high proportion of military children. I left posters around the school, all parents of the school were emailed about my study, all MCC took information packs home, and I also posted on various social media pages associated with the school. Additionally, I visited the eight key-stage-two classrooms and presented my study directly to the children. The children were keen to talk with me and share their stories; many children approached me on the day asking to take part. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm did not translate into recruitment; just four children from the pupils I spoke to at the school (approx. 240) eventually became participants.

I have reflected on the obstacle of recruitment. It is possible that the reluctance to engage may represent a cynicism on behalf of parents, or a misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the study. Although I was careful to present the study as an opportunity for families to discuss support for their children, I wonder if some parents saw the premise of the research as inherently critical of their lifestyle. Some parents may not be prepared to acknowledge that aspects of military life can be challenging or even detrimental for their children. I can empathise with previous research which has found military families reluctant to engage with services:

*"Though it was noted that military-connected families are hesitant to seek outside help, participants highlight the close-knit nature of the military community and the intracommunity expectation that members of the group will provide social and emotional support for one another" (De Pedro, 2014, pg. 16).*

This quote also encapsulates another reflection; that perhaps I was not afforded access to these families as I am an 'outsider' to the military community. Many of the avenues I attempted to pursue were met with a dead end; including reaching out to several military organisations and charities and attempting to post on several military community social media pages. I met with the administrator of a military community social media page after such a request, and she told me that my project would be met with distrust as I was not from a military background myself. She discussed the management of her social media group and told me that she had recently 'cleansed' the group of all civilian members. I found her choice of language interesting. It is of course possible that the extreme reticence I met when attempting access to this group was due to other factors (e.g. child age) but my overall impression was that it was more to do ingroup/outgroup dynamics. This view is supported by the fact that two of my participants were eventually recruited through personal connections. It is important for me to reflect upon and be transparent about my own position as an outsider when conducting this research. There are advantages and disadvantages to the insider/outsider divide. Some (e.g. Hellawell, 2007) have argued that insiders are better positioned to build rapport and able to identify when participants are saying what they truly believe as opposed to what they think a researcher wants to hear. I do not believe this to be true in this case. I feel that my distance from the military community allowed me to approach the topic from the standpoint of a curious bystander; I was arguably less emotionally involved and able to ask naïve questions to gather detailed information. My experiences as a teacher, parent and trainee EP aided me in building rapport and I worked hard to make the participants feel at ease and comfortable.

Regarding data analysis, it is important to reflect upon the impact I may have had upon the findings. Although an outsider, I did have some experience of working with MCC and I was keen to avoid my own preconceptions influencing the analysis. To do this, I chose Braun and Clarke's model of TA because it offered a clear framework that could produce a complex and rigorous analysis. I believe this structure provided some distance between my prior experiences and the dataset. Throughout data collection, I also acknowledged and reflected upon my own beliefs and experiences using field notes, so that I was consciously aware of them and to avoid them influencing either the data collection or the analysis.

### 5.11. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented how the findings from the current research contribute towards the evidence-base on the topic of MCC, both in terms of their offerings to previous research and psychological theories. It was important for me to use the children's voices as a vehicle

for increasing awareness and understanding of the issues that MCC face in their homes and schools. To this end, I have generated some recommendations and issues to consider for schools, families, educational psychologists and the children themselves. The chapter also included a critical review of the study, by identifying strengths and weaknesses, as well as suggesting further avenues for research. Finally, the chapter concluded with some personal reflections on the opportunities and challenges this study presented.

### 5.12. Concluding remarks

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of military-connected-children through the use of qualitative research, to foster a better understanding of the lived experiences and views of this group. To date, the voices of this group have been largely unheard, particularly in the UK. Through this endeavour, the hope was that young children from military families would be given a platform to talk about how the circumstances of their upbringing impact upon them at home and at school in both positive and negative ways. The research questions and methodology selected were suitably broad and flexible to allow the children freedom to talk about what was important to them. It was also hoped that facilitating the children's voices in this way would provide messages for parents and professionals to help them gain a better understanding of how to support MCC and encourage them to flourish by targeting interventions around support the children themselves identify as important.

The children in this study; Luke, Ivy, Ellie, Kai, Thomas, Molly, Charlotte and Belle, recounted a wide range of experiences and views. They spoke of the challenges associated with their lifestyle; the difficulties brought about by mobility and the impact this has upon their relationships and feelings about settling in their schools and communities. They talked about living with uncertainty and parental absence due to deployment and described how, at times, this can lead to anxiety and fear. The children also talked of positive experiences, of making new friends and having new experiences as they move. The children were able to recognise that although at times challenging, being raised within a military family may also have benefits, particularly in terms of their social abilities. Although the children's stories revealed considerable diversity in terms of experiences, there were some common threads, particularly around their education. All of the children have experienced interrupted access to the curriculum, involving repeating or missing out on learning.

Some key psychological theories proved useful in facilitating a deeper understanding of the children's lived experiences. Considering the children's needs through the lenses of belonging and attachment illustrated how high levels of mobility and parental deployments may compromise feelings of safety and security for MCC. Bio-ecological systems and resilience theories proved useful for identifying areas for targeted support. Whilst this work is not without its flaws, and the recommendations for policy and practice that have emerged are based on a small sample, the findings in terms of messages and recommendations are

supported by previous research. Further, unique contributions to the field have been presented, such as the importance of friendship-building to facilitate belonging in this group, and the use of objects to maintain a sense of attachment to absent fathers and friends. As previously stated, the ultimate aim of this research was to give voice to young MCC, an underrepresented group in UK research, and to this end, the aim has been achieved. The future hope is that this small-scale study contributes to the growing field of understanding the needs and experiences of MCC, and offers some guidance to educational professionals and parents who support these children. Listening to and representing the voices of children is fundamental to the work of an Educational Psychologist, and I hope to continue to seek opportunities to do this with all groups and individual children I work with in the future.

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## Appendix 1: Procedure for database searches

### 1. PsycInfo search (last conducted on 07.06.18)

Search terms	Total of hits
1. Military (or army)	26077
2. Child*	592027
3. Combine 1 and 2 with 'and'	2257
4. Experiences (or views, or attitudes, or perceptions, or beliefs)	5149428
5. School* (or education*)	2031681
6. Combine 4 and 5 with 'or'	305699
7. Combine 6 and 3 with 'and'	319
8. Limited to past 5 years and peer-reviewed	92
9. Papers remaining after exclusion (following abstract search for relevance)	<b>21</b>

Initially tried other synonyms: e.g. Defence, or Soldier, young person, adolescent – but brought up too many hits

Restricted to key terms found in the abstract as too many hits

### 2. Combined database search: Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index and Child Development and Adolescent Studies (last conducted on 07/06/18)

Search	Total
1. Military (or army)	12330
2. Child*	611978
3. Combine 1 and 2 with 'and'	1753
4. Experiences (or views, or attitudes, or perceptions, or beliefs)	656434
5. School* (or education*)	1756087
6. Combine 4 and 5 with 'or'	1159
7. Combine 6 and 3 with 'and'	149
8. Limited to post-2000 and peer-reviewed	113
9. Papers remaining after exclusion (following abstract search for relevance)	<b>23</b>

### 3. EThOS search (e-theses online service from the British Library) (last conducted on 07.06.18)

Search terms	Total
1. Military+child*	25
2. Papers remaining after exclusion (following abstract search for relevance)	<b>2</b>

## Appendix 2: Example page of systematic literature review

Lit review - Excel

Tell me what you want to do

**File Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Help**

**Clipboard** Paste Cut Copy Format Painter

**Font** Calibri 11 Bold Italic Underline Font Color Text Color Background Color Alignment Merge & Center Wrap Text General Number Percent Decrease Increase Conditional Formatting Styles Cell Styles Delete Format Insert Cells AutoSum Sort & Filter Find & Select Editing

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Author	Year	Title	Journal	Methodology	Natio	Key points	Implications for thesis	Critique	
1 Lincoln & Sweeten	2011	Cons for the e Soc work in he Case studies (x3)	US	Psychological adjustment depends on a numbe	research ne V small scale case study, not much det				
2 Lowe et al	2012	Impact of mil J of Fam Studi Q'naire (PRG & FUS	US	Survey mil dependants about parent-child rels	Include in section on attachment				
4 Jain et al	2016	Best/worst thl Journal of the Online qnaire n=UK	UK	Positives: pride, money, relocating (12 said notl V mixed views, compare to my child view Issues with choices over coding, distar					
5 Eodanable & Lauc	2011	Promoting + e School Psy Int	Ints, qnaires, obs, UK	Exclude: only refers to in combat scenarios	Not rel				
6 Lincoln et al	2008	Psy adjustment & treatment Case studies	US	Hist of resilience, theoretical roots, research, rc Defs of resilience, rel to EP work	Discussion paper, no data				
7 Toland & Carrigan	2011	Ed psy & resili Sch Psy international	UK	Pop still understudied. Effects of mil life on chil	How do schools involve parents in their				
8 Palmer	2008	Risk & resilient Mil Psy	N/A	Effects of mil life on attachment	Include in attachment section				
9 Lieberman & Van	2013	Int & young cl Clin Ch Fam Ps N/A	US	Benefits of gp intervention; 10-session in-schoc Describes possible school-based interve	Exclude				
10 Rush & Akos	2007	Supporting ch J for Specialists in Gp work	US	Exclude: about a specific US mil school	Exclude				
11 Lamberg	2004	When mil par: JAMA	N/A	Deployed mil personnel report deployment ha: Over half thought that deployment had V large purposive sample, longitudina					
12 Thandi et al	2017	Perceived effe Occ Med	Self-report qnaire UK	Reviewed 9 US studies	Exclude: specifically about Iraq/Afghan (N/A				
13 White et al	2011	Imp of deploy Int Rev of Pscyc Meta-analytic rev US	Focus gps age 12- US	Adols experience sense of uncertainty & loss w Child voice data, theory of ambig loss us Adolescents, US, good example of chil					
14 Huebner et al	2007	Par deploy & y Family Rels							
15									
16									
17									
18									
19									
20									
21									
22									

Mil fams Child views Interventions Papers from snowballing Outcomes Parents



## Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Date

Dear [pupil's name],



### Research Project on Helping Pupils from Military Families



My name is Amanda and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. This means that I go into different schools and talk to pupils (and adults) about how children think and feel about their learning and how they are getting on at school and at home.

I am really interested in finding out more about pupils who have a parent who works away in the military. I am especially interested in finding out how these pupils feel about home and school, and how they would like their school to help them to be happy and learn well. I am contacting a few pupils in [REDACTED] to give them the chance to be part of this project and have their say!



I would like to invite you to meet with me and have a talk about these things. I'd like to meet you, tell you about the project, and ask you about the support you receive in school. I am really interested to hear your views and ideas. Our talk would take

no longer than an hour and I would record our conversation to make sure I remember it right!



**It is completely up to you if you want to take part.**

**You will always have the chance to ask questions or to decide that you don't want to take part anymore. If you decide that you don't want to take part after we have spoken, I will destroy your information. Please tell me within one month if you change your mind.**



**I promise to listen carefully to anything you say and to keep your information private and safe as much as I can (I would only break this if you told me something that made me worry about you or someone else getting hurt).**

**I will write a report and include some of the things you say, but I will make sure I don't include your name. I could come to your home or to your school to chat to you, it's completely up to you where and when we meet.**





Please talk to your parents about the project and have a think about whether you would like to take part. If you have any questions about anything, please ask your Mum or Dad to email me at [ah15169@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:ah15169@bristol.ac.uk) and I will email you straight back. I have included a form for you to fill out and post back if you are interested.

I hope to meet you very soon and thanks for reading this!

Amanda

(I have included a photo of me so you can see what I look like!)



## Appendix 4: Consent forms

### Research Project Pupil Consent Form

Please tick if you agree		
I have read and understood the project information letter, and discussed it with my parent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that it is completely my choice to take part and that I can change my mind at any time without giving a reason. If I change my mind <i>after</i> talking to Amanda, I can ask her to destroy my information (up to <i>one month</i> after my interview).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that everything I say to Amanda is private (unless I talk about something that could cause harm to myself or others).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am happy to talk with Amanda and to be recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that Amanda will keep my information safe and will not use my name in her reports.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to meet Amanda at my: (please tick <b>one</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/> Home	<input type="checkbox"/> School

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your school: \_\_\_\_\_

Your year group: \_\_\_\_\_

## Research Project Parent Consent Form



	Please tick to confirm
I confirm that I have read and understood the project information letter, had the chance to ask questions, and discussed it with my child.	
I understand that mine and my child's participation is entirely voluntary and that we can change our minds at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that the information I/my child shares with Amanda is confidential (unless I/they discuss information that indicates a risk of harm to themselves or others).	
I am happy for my child to participate in an interview with Amanda.	
I understand that the anonymised interviews will be saved on a secure server, according to the Data Protection Act, at the University of Bristol, and that the data could be used at a later date by other researchers.	
I understand that I can withdraw my data for up to <i>one month</i> after the interview	

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's school: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's year group: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Contact letter and information sheet for schools

---

Date

Dear Headteacher,

### **Re: Research project on Supporting Children from Military Families**

My name is Amanda and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working on placement for two years in [REDACTED] Council, based in [REDACTED] and covering a patch of schools in [REDACTED]. As part of my doctoral training at the University of Bristol, I am required to carry out a research thesis starting later this year. The project has been approved by The University of Bristol Ethics Committee (School of Policy Studies).

For my thesis, I am interested in exploring how primary schools support children from military families. I am particularly interested in listening to children's voices about their experiences and the support they receive in school. As part of this research, I would also like to meet with a group of school staff to hear their views.

**I would be very grateful if you could pass this letter to the member of staff in your school who is responsible for service pupil premium children.**

Through this research, I hope to:

1. Hear and represent **children's voices** about the experience of having a parent (or parents) in the military and how this has impacted upon their education. To explore what kind of support the children would like to receive in school.
2. Identify the support offered by schools to military families and explore with **school staff** how these packages of support have come about. To explore staff perceptions of the effectiveness of their current offer.
3. Explore the match between 1 and 2 by speaking with **pupils** in order to reveal whether the current support offered meets the needs of these pupils, or whether there are any gaps in provision/potential for improving schools' offers.

To do this, I am hoping to: a) hold a one-off focus group for staff members in which we would discuss how schools support and provide for this group, and b) conduct individual interviews with children either in their homes or at school.

I am writing to offer you the chance to be part of this research. I believe that taking part could have significant benefits for your school. For example, participation in the focus group would give schools the

chance to hear how other schools are supporting this group and share best practice. I would also share a summary of my thesis with you once written, which would provide information about children feel about the support they receive at school and therefore could be used for evaluations of interventions.

To clarify, to take part in this research, you will need to:

- Take part in a one-off focus group with other school staff.
  - This will be no longer than two hours, arranged for a time/date/location that is convenient to you and will be digitally recorded to ensure the information I collect is accurate. Our discussion will focus on how your school supports children from military families.
- Pass on my letters and consent forms to children in your school who meet the criteria of my research (they are in Years 4-6, and have a parent in current active military service, which takes them away from the family home).
  - I hope to interview up to 10 children across several schools and will choose interested names randomly to ensure fairness. I will plan a number of child-friendly activities in order to gather the children's views in an enjoyable way.

All information provided by all participants will be anonymous and confidential, as much as possible. It will be kept securely at the University of Bristol, according to the Data Protection Act and may be used at a later date by other researchers. I will include the data in my thesis, but all names will be removed. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time before the focus group.

Should you agree to take part, or if you have any further questions, I would be delighted if you could get in touch via email by [date] at [ah15169@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:ah15169@bristol.ac.uk) My supervisors name is Dr. Beth Tarleton and she can be contacted in case of queries or complaints at: [Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Beth.Tarleton@bristol.ac.uk)

I will then liaise with all interested staff to arrange a suitable date, time and place for the focus group. If you are prepared to host the focus group, please let me know. I very much hope to hear from you soon.

Warm wishes,

Amanda Hayllar

Trainee Educational Psychologist, [REDACTED] Council, D. Ed. Psy. (in training)

## Appendix 6: Participant vignettes

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### Belle

Belle is 10 years old and attends Year 6 of a mainstream primary school. She lives with her mother, father and brother, who is two years younger than her. Belle's father is an instructor in the army, and her mother is in the process of setting up a café and soft play on the local army camp, where Belle's family live.

Belle has moved house five times and has attended three different schools. She has been at her current school since she was in Year 4.

Although Belle thinks that her Daddy's job is 'cool', she finds two things really tricky; missing her friends when she moves, and missing her Dad when he goes away.

Friends are really important to Belle and she returned to the topic of her friends repeatedly during the interview. Although Belle has made new friends in her current school, she really misses her old ones whom she sometimes visits.

Belle talked to me about her father, whom she adores. He often goes away for work; sometimes for two or three weeks and sometimes for up to six months. Belle's father has been deployed in Iraq and Bosnia. Although Belle has got more used to her father going away, she really misses him when he goes and she will be glad when he leaves the army, which he is due to do in three years.

Belle is excited about starting secondary school in September, and when she grows up she would like to be an author, actress and vet; all at the same time!

## Charlotte

Charlotte is 10 years old. She has a large family; her mother, father, and four siblings. Charlotte is the youngest. Charlotte was interviewed at home during the school holidays, but in term time she attends an independent boarding school with some of her siblings. Charlotte's father is a commander in the army and her mother works as a matron in a local preparatory school.

When she was six years old, Charlotte and her parents lived in Kenya, where her father was in overall command of the British Army there. Charlotte's siblings were already in boarding school so they remained in England, although Charlotte saw them frequently when she visited the UK, or when they came out to Kenya. Charlotte loved the adventure of living in Kenya, and really enjoyed the weather and the exciting animals. Charlotte is quite positive about the army as a career and is excited by the idea of living in other countries. Initially she was sad to come back to England, but she has settled well into her boarding school and is happy to be living with some of her siblings again.

Although Charlotte's parents have moved house a great deal (eight times) and it is likely they will move again, Charlotte is unconcerned about this as she knows her school will remain the same until she goes to senior school. Charlotte loves boarding for the consistency it gives her, and also because she gets to do fun things in the evenings, like trampolining. Charlotte's father works away a lot; at the time of our interview he was in the US, but Charlotte thinks it does not affect her very much as most of the time she is at school.

Charlotte isn't sure what she would like to be when she is older. She has thought about a career in the army but she would not want to be an officer as she thinks it would be boring. She would also be scared about the prospect of war. Charlotte's father has been to Afghanistan, and when she was younger, Charlotte used to worry about his safety, but now she understands that he would not be involved in direct fighting due to his rank.

Charlotte loves playing hockey, and loves her dogs, her friends and her family.

## Ellie

Ellie is the oldest of the participants at 11 years old. She lives with her parents and two younger brothers on an army camp. Ellie's brother also took part in the study (Kai). Ellie was interviewed at home. Ellie has lived in six houses and has attended six schools.

Ellie's Dad has worked in the army since he was 16. He frequently works away from the family home, often for months at a time. Ellie thinks her Dad's job is 'awesome'; but she is very close to him, and really misses him when he goes away. She has developed her own coping mechanisms such as keeping objects of his close to her, and packing notes or objects in his bag so he knows that Ellie is thinking of him. Ellie keeps in touch with her father while he is away, but sometimes she finds using technology frustrating as she yearns for his physical presence. Recently Ellie's Dad has been going away less and Ellie has enjoyed having him at home. However, he is just about to change his role and will be going away more, which Ellie is dreading. She particularly hates it when he is away on special occasions, such as birthdays.

Ellie was born in Germany whilst her father was deployed there. She lived in Germany until she was three, when the family moved back to the UK. They stayed in the UK until Ellie was 7, and then they returned to Germany again. In Germany, they lived and schooled on an army base. Ellie's family moved back to the UK when she was 9 and she has been at her current school since then. Ellie prefers her current school where there are hardly any military children. Ellie prefers UK schools as she thinks that they are more fun and she studies subjects that she did not get the chance to in Germany, such as RE, History, Music and Art.



## Ivy

Ivy is 10 years old. She lives with her parents and her brother. Ivy attends Year 6 of her local mainstream primary school, where she has only been for a couple of months. Prior to this she lived in another Wiltshire town, but she has also lived in other towns in the UK and in Germany for two years. Ivy found it difficult to create her timeline as she has lived in so many places that she wasn't completely sure she hadn't forgotten any. Ivy thinks she has lived in 6 different houses and attended 3 schools.

Ivy understands that high mobility is a part of the army lifestyle and is accepting of this. She used to find moving harder when she was younger but she has got more used to it now. Ivy's mum has just started working at the school as a midday supervisor and Ivy thinks this has helped her to settle in.

Ivy's father works in the army. He has been deployed in Egypt and Afghanistan twice. He does still work away but less often now, and Ivy has become more used to it. When he goes, her Mum becomes more relaxed with her parenting at home and often indulges Ivy and her brother (e.g. by letting them eat food that Dad does not approve of). Ivy said that her Dad is going to leave the army in the next 4-6 years. Although Ivy is pleased at the prospect of being more settled once her Dad leaves, she thinks it will mean another move as they want to buy a house so they will move to a cheaper area.

Although she likes her new school, Ivy was happier at her old one because she had more friends. Friendships are really important to Ivy. She had some very good friends at her old school and she misses them. She feels guilty about one particular girl who was quite attached to her and she worries that this girl has no one else to play with now that Ivy has left. For Ivy, relocation and the affect this has on friendships is a bigger stressor than her father's deployments at the moment.

Ivy enjoys maths. She does not know what she would like to do for work when she is older but she knows she does not want a career in the army as she does not like the idea of fighting.

## Kai

Kai is 8. He lives with his Mum, Dad, older sister (Ellie, also in the study) and younger brother. Like Ellie, Kai has lived in Germany and moved back to the UK a couple of years ago.

Kai has undiagnosed autism. Kai's brother has a diagnosis of autism and Kai's mother is in the process of seeing a diagnosis for Kai too. Kai has been seen by a Paediatrician and Speech and Language Therapist, both of whom have said that they feel that Kai has autism. Kai's mother has known for a long time that Kai is autistic, but is not generally in favour of labelling children. She has been opposed to seeking a label for Kai and his brother, but it has been so difficult to access support for him without a diagnosis that she now feels she has no choice. Each time the family move house, it is difficult to get support in school for Kai as he does not arrive with a 'paper trail' or a diagnosis. Kai's mother feels that a diagnosis may safeguard him for future moves and he is more likely to receive the additional support he needs. The support Kai has received in school thus far has been inconsistent; he had a particularly supportive teacher last year, but this year's teacher is not as understanding. Kai's mum hopes that a diagnosis might help others to recognise and understand his needs.

Kai was happy to participate in the research, but the interview was rather short as Kai was reticent with me and less talkative than the other participants. Kai talked to me about his father's job and he said that he wishes they could all stay in one place. Kai worries about his father's safety as he sees working in the army as a dangerous profession. Sometimes, Kai worries that his father may be killed.

Kai loves computers of all kinds, and particularly enjoys gaming using Roblox, a virtual and immersive gaming site where he can play games, build virtual environments and have adventures. Kai also likes Doctor Who and YouTube, and sharing a room with his brother. Kai is the fastest typist in his school. When Kai grows up, he would like to own a sweet shop so that he can eat all of the sweets.

## Luke

Luke is 10 years old and lives with his parents and younger sister. He attends Year 6 of a mainstream primary school, where he started at the beginning of the academic year. Luke was the first participant to be interviewed and he was interviewed at home. Until recently, Luke's family lived in Norfolk but they recently moved here for his Dad's job after he was promoted. Luke has lived in three houses and attended three schools; he is one of the least mobile participants in the study.

Luke is the only participant in the study whose father is not in the army. Luke's father is an engineer in the RAF. Luke's father used to work away a lot (Luke estimates that he used to be away for around half of each year), but he has recently changed jobs and he is now at home much more. Luke is really happy about this, and is happy about his new primary school, where he has settled and made new friends. At Luke's last primary school he was one of very few military children but his current school has around 50% of military children on roll, which he prefers. Luke did not like feeling different to everyone else.

Luke is not sure what he would like to be when he is older, but he is very studious and enjoys science, so maybe something in this area. He knows that he does not want to work in the RAF as he does not want a job that takes him away from home, and he also does not want oily fingers like his Dad! At the time of the interview, Luke had been visiting secondary schools and was excited to see which secondary school he would be going to.

## Molly

At almost 8 years old, Molly was the youngest participant in the study. Molly is in Year 3 at a mainstream primary school. She has lived in five houses and attended five schools. Molly's Dad has been in the army since he was 17 years old. Molly lives with her parents, her brother and her sister. Molly is the youngest and her siblings are teenagers.

Molly has lived in Wales and in Germany. She knows she was born in the UK, but she moved to Germany when she was young and she still feels like Germany is her home. She left Germany when she was six to move to Wales, and then she moved to her current location in Wiltshire. During the interview, Molly become tearful several times when talking about her moves. Although Molly likes her current school, she looks back fondly upon her life in Germany and misses it. Sometimes Molly sees things on the television about Germany and when this happens, Molly goes to her bedroom to cry in secret. Molly said she had never confided in an adult about her feelings before and she feels pressure to appear happy at all times, as that is how others see her. Molly once talked to a friend about her feelings, but her friend laughed and Molly has not tried again. Molly was happy for me to talk with staff at school and her parents about how sad she became during the interview.

Molly absolutely adores unicorns. She also loves talking and is a self-confessed chatterbox! She wanted to take part in the study as it was a chance to come out of class and do some talking, which she is not allowed to do in class. When she is older she would either like to be a police horse rider or a clown in the circus.

## Thomas

Thomas is 10 years old and is in Year 6 of a mainstream primary school. He has been at the school for two years. Thomas was interviewed in school. Thomas lives with his younger sister and his parents. Thomas's Mum works for social services and Thomas's Dad is a sergeant in the army.

One of the first things Thomas told me was that his Dad is not in work at the moment as he has post-traumatic shock disorder (PTSD). Thomas's Dad has been ill for some time, and although Thomas is not sure exactly what caused the PTSD, he knows that his Dad has seen some 'horrible stuff' as a result of war. Thomas's Dad has been to Iraq. Thomas told me that, because of his PTSD, the army are 'kicking him out' and he will be out of the army soon, but the family do not know exactly when this will happen. Thomas thinks that there is no cure for PTSD and that his Dad will be ill forever, although hopefully he will be able to manage his symptoms with therapy, which he attends. Thomas said that the PTSD makes his Dad feel sad and not able to go to war. He is currently at home and considering his options. Thomas was very philosophical about his Dad's illness and said that he thinks it is 'all just a part of life'.

Thomas has lived in five houses and attended four schools. He has lived in a variety of places, including Kent and Northern Ireland. Thomas does not like moving and finds it all very annoying. The thing he dislikes most is making new friends. Thomas described himself as 'not a social expert' and struggles to make new friends; this has not got easier over time for him. When he moves to a new place, Thomas does not actively try to make new friends, but instead waits for friendships to happen. He is more interested in being friends with civilian children as there is less likelihood that they will move. Thomas is quite quiet and reserved, and does not find it easy to talk about his feelings as he worries about how he will come across to others.

## Appendix 7: Interview topic guide

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1. Problem-free talk about school/family e.g. tell me about your class/teacher/learning this week, who lives in your family etc.
2. Tell me 3 important things about yourself.
3. What is it like to have a parent in the military?
  - a. Good things
  - b. Bad things
  - c. Do you think any of these things affect you at school?
4. Do you have any extra support because of your background? How does your school support you?
5. What has been most helpful/unhelpful about how school support you?
6. Do you have any ideas about how schools could help further?
7. Anything else you would like to talk about on this topic?

## Appendix 8: Example pages of data with initial codes (coded using NVivo 11 Pro)

Nice to be around someone familiar  
Acceptance of circumstances  
Felt settled then had to move  
Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away  
Scared when started at new school  
I'm used to making friends by now  
Importance of objects to maintain sense of connection  
Miss the familiar  
Want more stability  
I will miss school when we move again  
Takes me a while to settle and make friends  
Different in house without Dad  
Army means fighting, danger or war  
Not important to friendships what parents do  
Parents don't understand  
I meet new people when I move  
Increased resilience over time  
Yearn to move back to somewhere familiar  
I miss my old life  
Having a long time between moves makes moving harder  
Introduced new things to new school from old school  
Comparing lifestyle with non-army kids  
Moving is hard  
Other people don't understand  
Conflicting feelings about moving  
Schools should be more aware and sensitive to army chr's needs at different times  
Possibility of reuniting with army friends when they also move  
Other army friends also move  
Holding in or concealing negative emotions from others  
Differences between schools  
Coding Density

1A

*Ok so, what the first thing to do is I'm going to ask you some questions, ok, and we're going to do a quick activity as well. Shall we do the activity first or some questions first?*

*Questions.*

*Ok so my first question is quite random ok. If I was to go and meet an alien and they were to ask me three important things about [redacted], what should I tell them [redacted]? 3 important things about you. Anything at all about your life your family.*

*you should say that she really really really really loves unicorns.*

*She really really really really lovely unicorns*

*yeah that's probably probably probably, I just repeat everything. She really loves unicorns*

*Ok that's one. What else have you got? Anything about you or your family or your life?*

*When my dad goes away I miss him*

*when your dad goes away you miss him*

*yeah. I like all my presents that I get. Even if even if I have one I would still like, be happy because people spent their money for me and I think they should be respected as well.*

*That's a lovely thing to say, thank you. And you mentioned about when Daddy goes away, so does Daddy work in the army or the navy or the RAF do you know?*

*He works in the Royal Army.*

*the Royal Army, ok. do you mind if I ask you a few more questions about that later on?*

*Yeah.*

*Is that alright?*

*Yeah.*

*So you know why I'm here, why did you want to see me today? Why did you agree to do this?*

*Because one, I'll probably miss some of my story but I don't really mind. Two, I don't need to do any learning.*

*So you agreed to see me so that you could get out of class?*

*No not really [laughs].*

*Yes [laughs]! Any other reasons?*

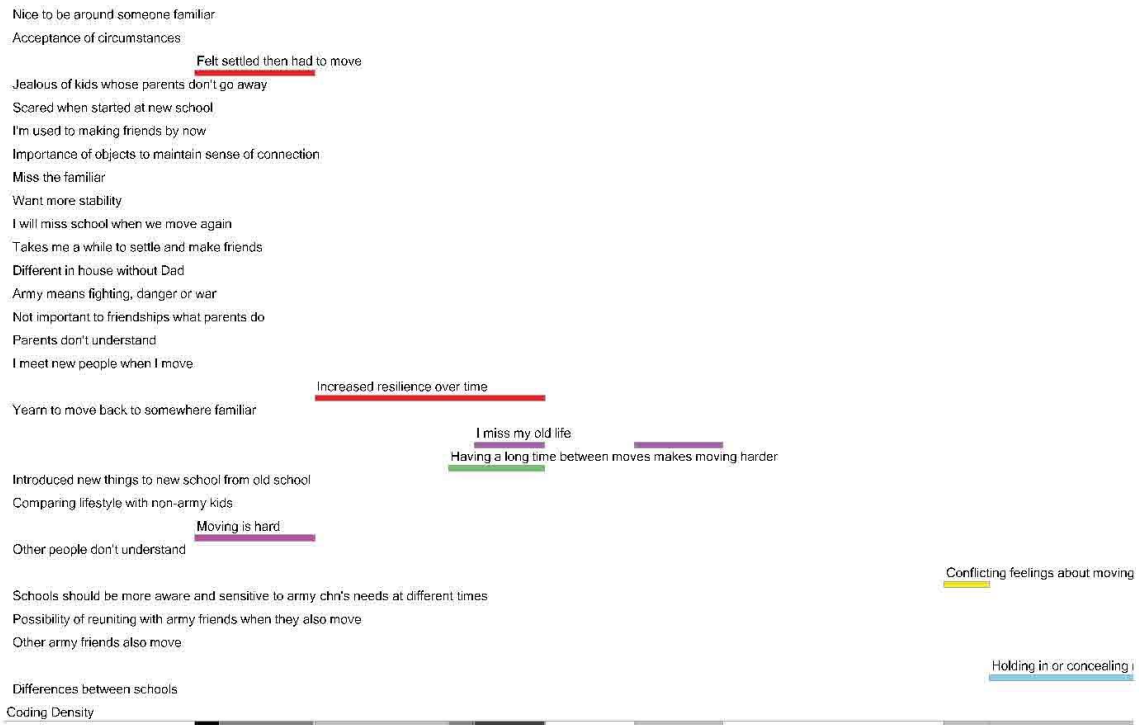
1 / 18

Nice to be around someone familiar  
Acceptance of circumstances  
Felt settled then had to move  
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Scared when started at new school  
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Coding Density

---

And I like chat, I like talking and we're not really allowed to talk in class.  
Ok, so it's an excuse to come out and have a chinwag, yeah? That's a good reason. Ok thank you  
[redacted]. Right, shall we do our activity?  
Yeah.  
So it would be useful to get to know a little bit about your life would that be alright?  
Yeah.  
And the way that we're doing this, I've done it with other children, is that we are using a timeline.  
I am basically 8 in 2 months.  
8 in 2 months, goodness me. You're nearly an old lady. ok, so would you like to write or would you like me to write?  
I'll write  
Have you got good writing?  
Yeah. Nice and neat.  
Timeline activity. [redacted] do you know where you were born?  
I was born in England.  
Ok, do you want to write down there England?  
How do you spell England?  
E-N-G-L-A-N-D. Do you know whereabouts in England? it doesn't matter if you don't.  
I think it was [redacted], I think I'm not positive.  
And when you were born was dad already in the army?  
Yes, he started when he was 17  
And what about Mum?  
Mum, don't know about mum.  
Any brothers or sisters?  
[redacted] and [redacted] my older sister and my older brother. [redacted] has already had her birthday she's 15.





So are you the youngest or is there anyone after you?

I'm the youngest.

See you have an older sister and an older brother and a mummy and a daddy. And you were born in England ok. And then what was the first big change for you did you move house? Did you go to school?

Um, I think it was when I was like one so, I couldn't really remember, I moved house into Germany and I stayed there since I was like 6 so when I had to move to Wales I was really really sad because I I couldn't remember like when we moved I thought we were there for like, for my whole life but we weren't and I was really really sad.

Ok. Do you mind telling me a little bit more about what that was like?

It was, it was scary because it was like, I know it wasn't my first move but it was the first one...

The first one you could remember?

Yeah and I couldn't remember, of course I couldn't remember moving so I was really sad because I thought I was born there and I'd been there since I was six and it was a really big time and and I would miss my school [starts crying] and I miss my friends.

Oh [crying] is it making you feel sad talking to me? Shall we talk about something else for a bit?

Yeah ok.

I don't want to make you sad, that's not the point of this. What are the tears about?

I just, I miss being in Germany.

You miss being in Germany? Oh dear, how long have you been here?

I've been here, I've only been here for one year.

You've only been here for one year

Yeah.

Ok, and you had a lovely time in Germany did you?

Yeah and I have a nice time here but I'm just really missing Germany [crying]

Oh s[ad]: Have you got somebody you can talk to when you're feeling sad?

No I just like to keep it to myself

You like to keep it to yourself?

Nice to be around someone familiar  
 Acceptance of circumstances  
 Felt settled then had to move  
 Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away  
 Scared when started at new school  
 I'm used to making friends by now  
 Importance of objects to maintain sense of connection  
 Miss the familiar  
 Want more stability  
 I will miss school when we move again  
 Takes me a while to settle and make friends  
 Different in house without Dad  
 Army means fighting, danger or war  
 Not important to friendships what parents do  
 Parents don't understand  
 I meet new people when I move  
 Increased resilience over time  
 Yearn to move back to somewhere familiar

I miss my old life

Having a long time between moves makes moving harder  
 Introduced new things to new school from old school  
 Comparing lifestyle with non-army kids  
 Moving is hard  
 Other people don't understand  
 Conflicting feelings about moving  
 Schools should be more aware and sensitive to army chn's needs at different times  
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 Other army friends also move  
 Holding in or concealing negative emotions from others  
 Differences between schools  
 Coding Density

Yeah.  
*Why do you like to keep it to yourself?*  
 Because sometimes, when I get sad, I just [inaudible]. People don't get sad over this stuff and they might laugh.  
*I don't think anybody would laugh.*  
 Yeah, but one time I told someone and they laughed.  
*Who was that, that you was that that you told?*  
 It was my BFF  
*it was your friend was it?*  
 Yeah.  
*Maybe it's best to talk to a grown up when you're feeling like this could because they won't laugh. Would you like to stop talking to me?*  
 No. I just really miss Germany.  
*Does mummy or Daddy know how you feel?*  
 No, because I've not talked about it [crying].  
*I'm sure that mum or dad would listen and help you if they knew how you felt. Would you mind if I had a chat with Mummy about how you been feeling?*  
 I don't mind  
*That would be ok for you would it?*  
 Yeah.  
*Ok cause I wonder if mummy knows how upset you've been? Do you think she knows?*  
 No.  
*So you haven't told anybody about how you've been feeling?*  
 No one  
*You've been bottling all up inside? Goodness gracious me.*  
 And sometimes I watch like some TV programmes like from CBBC that like they go everywhere and sometimes they go to Germany and so I go up to my bedroom and have a cry.

Nice to be around someone familiar  
 Acceptance of circumstances  
 Felt settled then had to move  
 Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away  
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 Not important to friendships what parents do  
 Parents don't understand

I meet new people when I move

Increased resilience over time  
 Yearn to move back to somewhere familiar  
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 Other army friends also move  
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Differences between schools

Coding Density

But aren't you lucky that you got to go to Germany and learn all those things, it must have been an amazing experience for you to be so sad about leaving.

And in Germany there was two classrooms like there's two classrooms in year 3 but when we wanted to we could just go over into the other classroom.

So you were able to go between the two?

Yeah.

That's quite good isn't it.

And we don't, and sometimes if we wanted to go and learn a different thing like maybe a different thing at different times and stuff so if you're finding that lesson a bit boring you could just go into the other classroom, into the other one.

That's a good idea isn't it? So you get to mix it up a bit and do other things?

Yeah.

And what about here, what are the good things about being here?

It's good because I have made some new friends.

So you have made some new friends? So there are good things about being here too?

Yeah.

Do you feel ok now? Come and sit in the big chair. ■■■ are you happy to carry on talking to me because we can stop and go back to your classroom if you want to stop.

No its fine

Are you sure?

Yeah.

Ok. So I'll tell you what I'll do the writing, so you don't have to think about the writing so right now you're in ■■■ and you're in year 3.

3

And when did you come here?

Like a year ago.

So you were in Year 2?

Yeah just started, I started like a couple of weeks, like because I moved there in the summer I had two weeks off. Because it was my first bit. So I had two weeks off, so I was like 2 weeks after everyone else that I came and stuff.

*Oh so you came here in the summer holidays but then you had two weeks at home before coming starting at school?*

Yeah. And when, because I was new, and we had a look round on my first day we had a look round and we went, then we went we dropped [redacted] off at his nursery and then we. And then [redacted] was my friend, because yeah. Because he lives just down by me.

*So [redacted] one of your friends?*

Sometimes.

*Sometimes. Boys are like that aren't they. So he's also, is he in your class?*

Yeah.

*So you knew [redacted] when you came here?*

Yeah and he was in my class last year as well. And I already knew, so when I was going there, when I was coming in I was a bit scared just in case there was no one there I knew and stuff. But [redacted] was actually in that class and he waved and he was like come over here and then he helped, and then he was my friend and helped me and stuff.

*So did that make you feel a bit better?*

Yeah but break time, I was trying to find, because I didn't know everyone so I was trying to find [redacted] but I couldn't find [redacted] so I, because there was a little tent I just sat in there all break.

*Ok, was that in your first break time?*

Yeah.

*So that was when you arrived in year 2 and then you've been here for about a year and then before that you were in Germany and how long were you in Germany for?*

Um like, because like when we moved I was 6 so I think like 5 years.

*Ok so you moved to Germany when you were quite young?*

I I started I moved there when I was one and then I finished there when I was 6 so like 5 years.

*And then you said about Wales as well?*

Yeah, I moved to Wales, I was there for a year.

Acceptance of circumstances  
Felt settled then had to move  
Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away

Nice to be around someone familiar

I'm used to making friends by now  
Importance of objects to maintain sense of connection  
Miss the familiar  
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Possibility of reuniting with army friends when they also move  
Other army friends also move  
Holding in or concealing negative emotions from others  
Differences between schools

Scared when started at new school

Coding Density

## Appendix 9: Complete set of initial codes generated using NVivo 11 Pro

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Acceptance of circumstances	<p>Researcher: So what do you think about daddy doing the job that he does, with all those things you just said?</p> <p>Molly: Like I don't want it to happen but it has to happen sometimes</p>	3	4
Army is just a normal job	Charlotte: I don't really think about it that much. I just thought like army was just like a normal job. 'Cause no one at that school had the same job as other people so, I just found that like all of us like army wasn't like, just a normal job	1	1
Army lifestyle can be fun	Charlotte: I think, living in the army, it doesn't make a big, like it's not a big stop in your life It's kind of quite fun. Yeah. It's not like it's letting me down in life so	1	3
Army means fighting, danger or war	Ivy: I just don't really like, um working in the Army or like some people like fighting the Army like fight with other countries or something, I don't really like doing that stuff	5	8
Army or Dad as protector	Ellie: He knows how to defend us if we're in an attack	4	4
Army supplies us with a house - good and bad	Kai: the Army supplies us with an army house but that means we can't damage it	1	1
Better at school work as a result of Dad's job	Luke: I'm quite high in my class and that's because with my dad in the military my mum makes it, makes us do our homework first so we don't, um get distracted or anything, because Dad's does that as well	1	1
Boarding school creates stability	<p>Charlotte: but it doesn't really bother me that much, moving</p> <p>Researcher: Yeah, why do you think that is?</p>	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
	Charlotte: Well because of my boarding school I don't really spend, I probably spend more time at school than here, apart from the weekends when I come back, so yeah and I, I, I like, because I'm at the school now if my parents move away I'll always stay, I kind of, I can just stay at that school until I go to senior school		
Can't remember moves	Ivy: I can't remember most of them. I can remember three	3	3
Circumstances will change in future	Thomas: Um, he can no longer go to war so he's going to have to leave and get a new job. The army are kicking him out	5	8
Comparing lifestyle with non-army kids	Molly: Because people can be people if they're in the army or not. It just, you have to go different places, you have to do different stuff. It doesn't really bother because I just have to move and learn and then move again and then learn and then move and learn and move then learn and move. But like, if you're not in the army you can just like stay there until you're in year 6 so then you have to go like you might move house so that you're closer to your other school then you can just go there until that and then you have to move closer to your to your university	1	1
Comparison with others: others have it worse	Charlotte: Some people have moved around a lot more, I've lived in 8 houses but I'd say that's kind of normal, that's average. Some people have moved around, like when they're 10 they have moved to like 11 houses or something like that	2	2
Conflicting feelings about moving	Molly: I'm happy how it is but I'm also sad how it is as well so I don't mind it at some points but then when I was in Germany when we had to move, I didn't like it	5	10
Contact with Dad when he was away helped me feel less scared	Charlotte: I was never properly scared like because he used to phone like every night and just so, yeah	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Current school has more kids from military than old school	Luke: The other bases, which I think is very good because you have more than one person just doing it because when I was at my old school there was just 3 people who, there was only 3 people who actually were in the military, who had parents in the military, including me	1	1
Dad goes away a lot	Belle: um, he goes away quite a lot. I think it was when I was 6 months he moved, he went to like Iraq for 6 months	3	4
Dad going away is bad	Ellie: The bad things are he goes away a lot	4	5
Dad leaving army will mean greater stability	Belle: oh I feel quite happy because that means he's not going to be going away as much and he'll be able to stay at home	3	4
Dad should be here	Charlotte: I felt a bit weird like, he should be here but he wasn't	1	1
Dad started going away when I was born	Ellie: when I was born my dad went away. That was when he started going away. He went away for six months	1	1
Dad's job - not to actually fight	Charlotte: Well he went to Iraq. And he went to Afghanistan but he wasn't like fighting he was just like planning and stuff	2	2
Dad's job is awesome	Ellie: He gets to let go away on fun trips and then come back like with loads of cool stories about it	3	4
Deployment cycle after	Researcher: And what's this bit like? Straight away after dad gets home?  Luke: I feel a lot better because you get to see him again	1	1
Deployment cycle during	Luke: It was okay really because you knew he'd be coming home soon and... But before it feels like it's gonna be ages and every day going so quick	2	2

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Deployment cycle hardest before	Charlotte: I think I find before the most difficult	5	12
Didn't like new place	Thomas: it was horrible there	1	2
Differences between schools	Molly: Sometimes because you have to learn, when you move schools they teach you differently and then I I remember that school they teach you that way so you try and do what they are and then sometimes you get just told off for that	4	13
Different in house without Dad	Belle: It felt really weird because I was always used to him being at home	5	11
Distractions help	Charlotte: But my dog had puppies, Bingo, so I kind of got a bit distracted. But I still missed him	1	1
Don't see friends again	Molly: A bit sad because I I don't get to see my friends ever again	2	2
Dont want to work in army	Ivy: I don't really want to work in the Army I don't really like I don't know what I want to be but I don't wanna work in the Army	7	9
Easier to cope whilst Dad away	Belle: while he was gone it was a lot easier to cope with because obviously for me if somebody goes or they're about to go I find it really hard but once they're gone I kind of find it a lot easier	1	1
Empathy and understanding from other army kids	Belle: I prefer where there's lots of kids in the army because that means then like they've been moving quite a lot so they would know like how it feels like when you move	1	1
Empathy for other children	Ellie: But my friend's dad couldn't come and I kind of knew how she felt	2	2



Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Excitement at Dad going away	Ivy: I was thinking that, um, that we were, that then maybe we would be able to because our dad doesn't really like, let us stay home alone, so then we would be able to stay home alone whilst my mum took my sister to beavers	1	1
Expected to know things in school that I didn't	Thomas: When I moved in, like, I was expected to know, and, well of course I didn't	1	1
Fall into new friendships	Thomas: most of the time it's happened they've overheard me talking about something that they also liked. And one of them I don't even know how it happened. We kind of just accepted the fact that we were friends. It was one of those	1	1
Family time together more special	Luke: Yeah the good things are because he gets paid lots so we get to do more and things with the family when he's back	1	1
Fear over Dad's safety	Kai: He might be killed	3	9
Feel fine in school	Belle: I feel just fine in school when I'm doing my work	2	2
Felt settled then had to move	Molly: when I had to move to Wales I was really really sad because I I I couldn't remember like when we moved I thought we were there for like, for my whole life but we weren't and I was really really sad	1	1
First moves hardest	Ivy: my first time of moving school I was like really worried like, what would all the other children look like	1	1
Gaps in learning due to moving	Charlotte: I've missed quite a lot of topics and I've also repeated quite a lot of topics	4	10
Guilt re friends left behind	Ivy: in my old school I always had this one person who I would play with, like one or two, like me and one of my other friends. But then, like, since I moved, no one wanted to like sit down and talk with her like we would. So then, um she just sits down by herself or she plays with her someone	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Happy when Dad comes back	Charlotte: then when he's back you get like really happy	1	1
Hard to leave friends behind	Belle: obviously I felt quite upset because I made loads of friends there and I was leaving them behind	5	6
Hard to talk about Dad when he's not there	Ivy: I want to talk too but I can't really talk about my dad without my dad actually being there	1	1
Harder the longer he's away	Thomas: Well really it depends how long he's gone. If he's gone for like a week or under, I'm fine with it. But if he's gone for like month for more then no, no. So really it depends how long he's gone	2	2
Having a buddy helped	Thomas: Yeah, they should definitely help them settle in and give them a partner who is usually really nice, yeah. I think that would be a good idea	2	4
Having a long time between moves makes moving harder	Molly: when I was in Germany I was there for like 6 years and I moved there when I was one and finished there when I was 6 so I was really upset because of that	1	2
Having family involvement with school helps to settle in	Researcher: Is there anything that anybody at school has done to make you feel welcome here or help you settle in? Adults or children?  Ivy: Well my mum works here now	1	2
Having siblings can get in the way of making friends	Charlotte: I spent most of my time with her and wasn't really trying to make friends	1	1
He gets paid quite a lot	Kai: he gets paid a lot of money	6	8
Holding in or concealing negative emotions from others	Molly: in the sad part it feels like I just don't want to tell anyone and it's just just like my my thing	3	10

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
I meet new people when I move	Ivy: I get to meet loads of new people when we move and I get to make new friends	3	7
I miss my old life	Molly: you miss your old friends, you miss your old school. You miss your old friends. You miss your school. You miss your teachers	6	14
I will miss school when we move again	Molly: Disappointing. Because I'll also miss this school	1	1
I'm able to handle it resilience	Thomas: I do feel kind of sad but I'm able to handle it	1	1
I'm used to making friends by now	Belle: Well I'm used to making friends by now	5	8
Impact of Dad's job you just don't settle	Luke: you have to, so when you've sort of settled, after going away, you have to go away again. And as soon as you settle there you have to go away again and then you just, you don't settle	1	1
Importance of knowledge about Dad's circumstances	Charlotte: it just felt a bit weird but I kind of knew, I knew what was happening, so it wasn't like I was four and I didn't know what's going on	3	5
Importance of objects to maintain sense of connection	Ellie: I sprayed his cologne in my room so it smelt like he was there	4	7
Importance of remaining parent protective factor	Belle: when I'm upset at home I just give my mum hugs	5	10
Important to be around people who have had a shared experience	Charlotte: they are going through the same thing as me so	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
In touch with old friends	Ivy: I still go back and visit, to visit my other friends who are who I actually meet up	3	4
Increased independence	Luke: sometimes when I need help I just need to do it by myself	2	2
Increased resilience over time	Charlotte: it doesn't really affect me as it used to. Sometimes, I mean I feel sad when he goes but it doesn't really affect me that much	5	9
Introduced new things to new school from old school	Molly: So I did that and I got a nice comment about that as well because everyone else started to do that and then now it's spreaded it around the school	1	1
Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away	Luke: was a bit tough because they got to have their parents all the time but we didn't	3	5
Keeping in touch by phone not enough	Ellie: There's always a bing where it says 'I love you too' and you just wanna see him a lot and you just don't wanna see a picture of him you want to see his face and see, and give him a big cuddle without just like an emoji or something of cuddling and stuff	1	2
Like to be around a mix of people	Charlotte: I'd prefer it probably 50/50	1	1
Lived abroad	Thomas: I've been about, I spent three years living in Northern Ireland	5	6
Lots of hard things about Dad's job	Luke: the hard things are, mmm, quite a lot of them	1	1
Lower in hierarchy P needs more help as younger	Luke: you don't have someone to help you when you need help because P's younger than me, she needs more help, in doing some things	1	1
Making friends requires effort	Charlotte: I think you've just got to get involved with um. You can't be scared	1	2

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Making new friends helps to settle in	Researcher: So the thing that's helped you to settle in most has been to make some friends?  Ivy: Yeah	1	1
Making prep for life post-army	Ivy: we're trying to save up for a house, because I think it's our last four or six years in the Army	1	3
Messages for teachers	Charlotte: I think, when someone does come new from any school, not just for military, they should probably, probably like, especially if they come in the middle of the year, they should ask them what they've done, what topics they've done, because some people, they find it really hard, like, catching up on different topics	1	1
Miss Dad when he goes or is away, feelings of sadness without Dad	Molly: When my dad goes away I miss him	7	10
Mixed feelings about army as a career	Belle: I think yes and no. yes because you get to like work and work on like cars and like help prepare them but I don't think it is good because you have to go away a lot on like courses and like training	1	1
More friends = happiness, protective factor	Belle: I was quite upset but when school started, and the day after I'd met people and made friends I started to feel less upset and I started to feel happy	1	3
More important that schools stays constant than house	Charlotte: I don't really mind where we live but yeah.  Researcher: To not have to change school again?  Charlotte: Well I wouldn't mind it but I'd prefer to stay	1	1
More socially adept in future due to Dad's job	Researcher: How do you think being a social butterfly will affect you as you get older?  Ivy: I think it will mean that I like work well with other people	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Moved schools and/or houses a lot	Molly: I just have to move and learn and then move again and then learn and then move and learn and move then learn and move	3	6
Moving is hard	Charlotte: I think the main bad thing is moving around the whole time	4	9
Negative impact of Dad's job on him	Thomas: sometimes he he is just feeling sad and nothing can help it. And he's got, he's going to therapy every now and then. To try and get over it	4	14
Negative impact of job on Mum	Belle: I think my mum kind of misses my Dad when he's at work because obviously then she has to look after both of us and it might be quite a struggle for her sometimes	2	2
Nice to be around someone familiar	Belle: it was quite nice because at least I knew somebody from there	2	2
Not a social expert	Thomas: I, I'm not that much of a social expert so it's really difficult making new friends	1	1
Not important to friendships what parents do	Luke: I didn't really mind about what, what, what jobs their parents have and things	3	7
Not many other army kids in school	Ellie: I know only, including my brother two, but without my brother one person I know at school at the moment. So I think that's the only other person I know that has their dad as an army	1	1
Once we're connected we're broken apart	Molly: I sort of settle in for like a year and then we and then me and other people start making friends through that year. And then when we're just connected we're broken apart	1	1
Other army friends also move	Thomas: the main difficulty is having forces friends. And, because usually, like, as soon as I like make a load of friends, either most of them move, like straight, pretty much like a few months after. Or I move a few months later	4	10

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Other people don't understand	Molly: they're just like normal people that their dads and stuff so they don't understand or anything. Their dads aren't in the army and they don't understand what it actually feels, because their dad doesn't go away and leave them, and so they don't know how it feels to miss their dad	1	2
Other people help and support me	Researcher: What's helped you? What's been helpful? Thomas: I think it's just been people around me trying to help and support me.	1	1
Parents don't understand	Molly: it's been a long time since we were in Germany and they forget it and they forget it and then they don't know how important it is to me	1	1
Possibility of reuniting with army friends when they also move	Belle: sometimes if your friends are also in the army, your friend's parents are also in the army you might see them again one day because if they keep moving then you might see them someday	4	6
Prefer not to move school again	Charlotte: I'd prefer to stay	1	1
Prefer to have civilian friends	Belle: my best friends aren't from the Army so I think that's quite good	3	7
Preparing for Dad going away by spending more time with him	Ellie: I am going to spend a lot of time with him	1	1
Preparing for friends' moving	Ivy: we spent as much time as we could together because she was moving	1	1
Pride in Dad	Ellie: I could have brought a slideshow or something or a picture of my dad. I have lots of pictures of him that he sent when I was younger and older and I could show everyone. I wouldn't mind doing that if I was there	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Promotions and rank	Thomas: he earns more money than the lower ranks, I know that. But nowhere near as much as the higher ranks	1	2
Repeating learning due to moving schools	Charlotte: I had done the Victorians times twice, once in Kenya and once here. So that's why my mum wanted me to start a new year	5	6
Reunion with serving parent	Luke: apparently I cried whenever he came back	2	2
Sameness with others is important	Kai: They talked about the Army a lot and they they liked to play army and I like doing as well. So we played army a lot of the time	3	10
Scared when started at new school	Molly: when I was coming in I was a bit scared	2	5
School good at providing support	Charlotte: we've always got stuff, we've always got someone to talk to or something to do, to do that. Our school's quite good on that stuff	3	5
School no one talked about it	Luke: they knew I was in the military, but no one really talked about it much	1	1
School treats mil and civ chn same	Ellie: just treated me the same as everyone else	2	3
School was terrible	Thomas: the schools were terrible	1	1
Schools make allowances	Luke: because we're in the military um, sometimes schools let us go off for a couple of days	2	2
Schools should be more aware and sensitive to army chn's needs at different times	Ellie: maybe they could be a bit nicer about it if your dad's away because you're already having a hard time you don't need like a harder time to make it worse	2	4



Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Schools should be more consistent	Charlotte: everyone, everywhere in the world, there should be the same learning curriculums	1	1
Siblings as protective factor	Charlotte: because I've got brothers and sisters, they are going through the same thing as me	1	5
Sometimes nice to go somewhere new	Charlotte: sometimes it's quite nice to go somewhere new	2	2
Sometimes want to be by myself	Ellie: I sometimes want to just go and sit somewhere nice by myself and read a book or something while their talking about their dads and their jobs and stuff	1	1
Takes me a while to settle and make friends	Molly: I sort of settle in for like a year and then we and then me and other people start making friends through that year	1	1
Teacher helped me to catch up with learning	Belle: I told the teacher that I didn't understand what we were supposed to be doing and she just helped me and like described everything that we've already learnt	1	1
Teacher said she would help but didn't	Ivy: The teacher said she was going to take me out but she never did so then I ended up doing it at home	1	1
Time straight after moving is weird	Charlotte: I first moved out it felt weird	1	1
Time with Dad more special	Charlotte: it kind of makes it, when he is here, like more, more special in some ways.	2	2
Uncertainty about the future	Thomas: We don't know exactly when his leaving, we only know he is leaving	1	2
Unpredictable job	Researcher: So, the idea of having to do things kind of last-minute without planning?	1	3

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
	Ellie: That'd be frightening		
Visiting old friends can also be sad	Ivy: when I get back to play with my old friends, I remember how fun it is and then I just want to stay with them	1	1
Want more stability	Kai: I wish I could just stay here	4	6
Want to spend time with Dad but he has to go	Ellie: we wanted to spend time with him but he said he had to go away	2	2
We get free flights	Charlotte: when we do go to live in abroad countries we always get like free flights back to England, like one a year	1	1
Went to a school on an army base	Ellie: In Germany we went to a school on a army base	1	1
Went with Dad to the airport	Ivy: we had to drive him to the airport um so that he could and so that like so that he could fly away	1	1
Worried that might forget Dad	Belle: I was only young then so I wouldn't really remember him much and he wanted me to remember him	1	1
Worry more when I'm at home	Thomas: I only really worry about that stuff when I'm at home.	1	1
Would like emotional support in school	Ivy: I could have done with someone like that just to like calm myself down for the first day or week or so	5	8
Would like less notice of Dad going so less time to worry	Charlotte: you don't want to know like the day before he goes, like maybe like, so you'd normally know about 2 months before maybe, like a month before or something like that	1	1

Name	Example data (from transcripts)	Sources	Refs
Would like non-mil chn to know what it's like	Belle: They should know that it's quite difficult for them when they move here because if they make lots of friends in their other schools	2	2
Yearn to move back to somewhere familiar	Thomas: It felt good being back in my home country and we weren't actually too far away from places I've lived before	3	4

## Appendix 10: Codes organised by sub-themes and themes

Theme	Theme 1: Negative impacts of military lifestyle						
Subthemes	'Once we're connected, we're broken apart': impact of mobility on friendships	'Dad goes away a lot': impact of absence on family relationships and dynamics	'I wish I could stay here': Desire for greater stability	Yearn for familiarity and a sense of loss	Uncertainty about the future	Emotional implications and responses to lifestyle	Impact on curriculum and learning
Codes	<p>Don't see friends again</p> <p>Hard to leave friends behind</p> <p>Guilt about friends left behind</p> <p>Visiting old friends can be sad</p> <p>Other army friends also move</p> <p>'I'm not a social expert'</p> <p>Making friends requires effort</p> <p>Didn't get much notice of friend leaving</p>	<p>Dad should be here</p> <p>Want to spend time with Dad but he has to go</p> <p>Miss Dad when he goes/is away</p> <p>Hard to talk about Dad when he is not here</p> <p>Dad going away is bad</p> <p>Different in the house without Dad</p> <p>Happy when Dad comes back</p>	<p>We move schools/house a lot</p> <p>I'd prefer not to move again</p> <p>You just don't settle</p> <p>Moving is hard</p> <p>Felt settled then had to move</p> <p>Didn't like new place</p> <p>Takes a while to settle and make friends</p> <p>More important that school stays constant than house</p>	<p>Yearn to move back to somewhere familiar</p> <p>I miss my old life</p> <p>Nice to be around someone familiar</p> <p>Possibility of reuniting with army friends when we/they move</p> <p>Sameness with others is important</p>	<p>Circumstances will change in the future</p> <p>Acceptance of circumstances</p> <p>I will miss school when we move again</p> <p>Army is an unpredictable job</p> <p>Dad leaving the army will mean greater stability</p> <p>Making preparations for life post-army</p>	<p>Worry that I might forget Dad</p> <p>Fears over Dad's safety</p> <p>Negative impact of job on Mum</p> <p>Negative impact of job on Dad</p> <p>Army = fighting, danger or war</p> <p>Worry more when I'm at home</p> <p>Holding in or concealing emotions from others</p> <p>Sometimes I want to be by myself</p> <p>Would like less notice of Dad going away so less time to worry</p>	<p>Repeated learning due to moves</p> <p>Gaps in learning due to moves</p> <p>Differences between schools</p> <p>Schools should be more consistent</p> <p>Expected to know things in school that I didn't</p> <p>Teacher said she would help but didn't</p>

	Fall into new friendships		Boarding school creates stability			<p>Jealous of kids whose parents don't go away</p> <p><b><u>Having mixed feelings</u></b></p> <p>Conflicting feelings about moving</p> <p>Mixed feelings about the army</p> <p>Having siblings can get in the way of making friends</p> <p>Don't want to work in the army</p>	
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Theme	Theme 2: <i>'Not letting me down in life': The opportunities and benefits of growing up in a military lifestyle</i>					
Subthemes	Practical benefits of Dad's job	Proud of Dad	Family time more special	Building new relationships	Good for me	'I'm able to handle it': resilience
Codes	<p>School make allowances</p> <p>'He gets paid quite a lot'</p> <p>'We get free flights'</p>	<p>Dad's job is awesome!</p> <p>Army/Dad as protector</p>	<p>Time with Dad is more special</p> <p>Reunion with serving parent</p>	<p>'Sometimes nice to go somewhere new'</p> <p>'I meet new people when we move'</p>	<p>Increased independence</p> <p>'I'm used to making friends by now'</p> <p>Empathy for other children</p> <p>Better at school work</p>	<p>First moves are the hardest</p> <p>Increased resilience over time</p> <p>Time straight after moving is weird</p>

	'Army supplies us with a house'			Introduced things from old to new school	I will work well with other people when older	Scared when started at new school  Easier to cope whilst Dad is away  Comparisons with others: others have it worse
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Theme	Theme 3: What helps me: promoting coping strategies and building resilience						
Subthemes	Maintaining a sense of connection	Access to information	Proactive planning	School as a protective factor	Need for empathy/understanding from others	Relationships with others	Needs change over time
Codes	<p>Contact with Dad made me feel less scared</p> <p>Importance of objects to maintain connection</p> <p>In touch with old friends</p> <p>Keeping in touch by phone is not enough</p>	<p>Scared as I didn't know what Dad was doing</p> <p>Need to know how/what Dad's doing when he's away</p> <p>Would like less notice of Dad going so less time to worry</p>	<p>Preparing for friends' moving</p> <p>Preparing for Dad going away</p>	<p>Feel fine at school</p> <p>School are good at providing support</p> <p>Having family involvement with school helps to settle in</p> <p>Teacher helped me to catch up on learning</p> <p>Would like emotional support in school</p>	<p>Would like civilian children to know what it's like</p> <p>Other people don't understand</p> <p>Parents don't understand</p> <p>Empathy and understanding from other army kids</p>	<p>Other people help and support me</p> <p>Importance of remaining parent as a protective factor</p> <p>Siblings as protective factor</p> <p>Making friends helps to settle in</p> <p>Friends as a protective factor</p> <p>Prefer to have civilian friends</p> <p>Important to be around people who have had a shared experience</p>	<p>Deployment cycle</p> <p>Schools should be more aware and sensitive to army children's needs at different times</p> <p>Harder the longer he's away</p> <p>Having a long time between moves makes it harder</p>

						Like to be around a mix of people Having a buddy in school helped Not important to friendships what parents do	
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## Appendix 11: Consideration of alternative data analysis methods

Method	Advantages in terms of the present study	Disadvantages in terms of the present study	Overall reflections
Grounded Theory (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-established method.</li> <li>• Associated with inductive approach.</li> <li>• Uses coding.</li> <li>• Can start coding during data collection.</li> <li>• Good for novel data (e.g. MCC voices). Builds theory from data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complex method – different versions on offer.</li> <li>• Time consuming.</li> <li>• Set research questions may inhibit effective use of grounded theory.</li> <li>• More interested in social processes than individual experiences (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2013). Developed in sociology rather than psychology.</li> </ul>	Difficult to achieve in short time frame given. More suited to a larger project and dataset and unknown at the time of analysis how many participants would be recruited.
Narrative analysis (e.g. Sparkes & Smith, 2008).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerned with 'storied' data – fits with children's experiences of being a MCC.</li> <li>• Knowledge seen as constructed – fits with my methodological assumptions.</li> <li>• Suitable for small dataset.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerned with stories and how these fit with our identity. Perhaps more relevant for older participants.</li> <li>• Stories should be kept intact – less relevant for coding and creating themes.</li> </ul>	Less relevant to the present study due to participants' age and aim to create themes relevant for professionals and parents. As well as representing individual voices I also wanted to link them together.
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (e.g. Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on how people make sense of their lived experiences.</li> <li>• Relevant for individuals and creating themes.</li> <li>• Relevant for small sample sizes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual focus of individual cases and themes means that it can lack depth, richness and substance (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2013).</li> <li>• Clear and precise method to be followed exactly – many unknowns in current study.</li> </ul>	Would be relevant for the present study. But a less flexible method than TA and perhaps less able to cope with uncertainties regarding sample size and data content. More relevant for child data than school staff views. Less emphasis on themes



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used for research questions concerned with experiences only – less relevant for school staff data.</li> </ul>	than individual experience and I wanted to generate findings for professionals working with MCC.
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